AN INVESTIGATION OF COLLEGE GRADUATES' AND EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GRADUATES' SOCIAL SKILLS PERFORMANCE IN VIETNAM

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Vietnam currently faces a social skills deficit among college graduates. This lack of sufficient social skills significantly affects Vietnam's economy where it is one of the main factors that drives higher unemployment in Vietnam. Research has shown that although social skills have been increasingly perceived by employers as one of the most important factors for graduate employability and career success, the absence of social skills training in colleges and universities have caused graduates to be ill-prepared for the workplace, which lead to dissatisfactions among employers and complications when seeking for potential hires in Vietnam. Therefore, this study aims to examine and compare perceptions of Vietnamese college graduates and employers on graduates' social skill performance. Given the objectives of this study, an online survey was distributed to potential participants across Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Analysis of the responses not only demonstrated a disconnect of perceptions between employers and newly hired graduates (NHGs) on how these two groups rated graduates' performance of interpersonal skills but also revealed a mismatch in the perceptions of the comparing groups on how they perceive the importance of social skills in graduate employment. As a result, it is recommended that Vietnam need to promote and support educators to incorporate more social skills training into their curricular so that students can be able to engage and develop those essential social skills during their time in college.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

With the upsurge of a skills-based economy and the constant advances in technology, workforce in the twenty first century has experienced vast changes. Historically, technical skills were the main skills required for job employment and the vital skills needed for career success (James & James, 2004). However, since the industrial economy has shifted to a knowledge-driven economy and an information society, the emphasis on technical skills as main assets are now needed to be accompanied by other set of polished skills, such as problem solving, leadership, communication, critical thinking, collaboration etc., in order to properly and optimally articulate, utilize, and manage knowledge assets. These are key components to creating and sustaining a high-performance organization (Brill, Gilfoil, & Doll, 2014).

Because any organization or enterprise is made of people, hence its success relies primarily on the human resources capabilities as well as on the level and type of collaboration people establish within that organization. Human capital is thus considered as a fundamental component for any business. The quality of human capital greatly impacts the outcomes that the company can achieve. This happens not only in the service industry but also in the manufacturing business. In the past, manufacturing companies of any type of industrial products were mainly concerned about the technical aspects of their production, in terms of facilities, systems, methodologies, components etc. (Cimatti, 2016). Therefore, they often tried to select and hire workers who were technically equipped and able to perform assigned tasks. However, this notion has changed over the years. Today, workers are viewed as a key element to success not only for their ability to perform a certain activity but also particularly for their generic competences, or in other words “soft skills” (Cimatti, 2016).

The term “soft skills” are described by Knight and Page (2007) as “wicked competences” as it is very difficult to define them. Soft skills can take on different forms in different contexts, and they constantly develop along the entire lifetime (Knight & Page, 2007). There is no universal inventory of “soft skills” that are always valuable. The skills that are needed for career success depend on social context or social environment. Different sets of soft skills will be required to succeed in the workplace if a person lives in different social settings or cultures, faces different situations or problems, and interacts with different people in different institutions. Consequently, the term “soft skills” is replaced by “social skills” throughout the current study in order to emphasize the social aspect of this type of skill sets.

Due to the transition from the industrial age to an economy based on knowledge and information technology, social skills are increasingly becoming critical for graduate employability, productive performance, and career progression in today’s workplace. Graduate employability is defined by Hillage and Pollard (1998) as “the capacity to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain employment if required” (p.2). Yet, according to the National Business Education Association, there is a dearth of social skills among college graduates that prevent them from getting or keeping employment (PCBEE, n.d.). Thus, the best way to prepare new college graduates for career success in this dynamic professional world is to develop not only their hands-on occupational skills but also their intra- and inter-personal abilities, or commonly known as social skills (Brill et al., 2014).

Politicians as well as practitioners and educational researchers have emphasized, over the past decade, the importance of enhancing academic skills and fostering non-academic attributes in higher education (Stephenson & Yorke, 1998). Those attributes, such as the ability to communicate, solve problems, or cooperate are often perceived as social skills (Bennett, Dunne,

& Carre, 1999). Unlike disciplinary knowledges or academic skills that are formally assessed and content-specific, social skills include a range of capabilities and competencies that are seldom assessed explicitly. Perreault (2004) described social skills as personal attributes, qualities, or characteristics of an individual that distinguish him/her from others who may possess similar technical skills and experience. Fraser (2001) viewed social skills as "[the] skills, abilities, and personal attributes that can be used within the wide range of working environments where [college] graduates operate in throughout their lives" (p.1). Those skills may include communication skills, leadership skills, cooperation skills, critical thinking skills, or problem-solving skills.

In the article named "Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities" (Kakepoto, 2004), the report indicated that an individual who embraces teamwork, gets along with others, has a strong work ethic and leadership ability, communicates effectively, and takes initiative is considered to have a refined set of social skills. According to Sutton (2002), social skills are identified as "the number one differentiator" (p. 40) for job applicants by recruiters and hiring managers in all types of industries. Moreover, Wilhelm (2004) also asserted that employers recognize social skills as the most important factor for workplace success. He further noted that most employers in the twenty-first century are looking for employees with accomplished foundation and human relation (social) skills; unfortunately, the current job candidates, especially for the entry-level positions, severely lack these skills when seeking employment (Wilhelm, 2004). From employers' perspectives, individuals who not only possess both technical skills and people (social) skills but also can integrate these two types of skills successfully will have significant competitive advantages over other employees and tend to excel at work (Glenn, 2003a). In sum, social skills play a crucial role in gaining and retaining

employment as well as in career advancement for college graduates.

Similar to other countries, the higher education system in Vietnam is also in charge of preparing and training a skilled workforce for the labor market (Tran, 2006; Ta & Winter, 2010). Locating on the eastern part of the Indochinese peninsula, Vietnam has a mainland territory covering a total area of over 332 km^2 (Thong, Nguyen, Bich, & Huong, 2017). The country also has a population of approximately 93.7 million (estimated in 2017) (GSOV, 2010). In 1986, Vietnam initiated an economic reform under *Doi Moi,* an "open-door" market oriented policy (Truong & Laura, 2015; Thong et al., 2015). Since then, the country has experienced high economic growth of 6 to 7% per year (Thong et al., 2015). Vietnam has been transformed from one of the poorest countries in the world with per capita income less than 100 USD in the early 1990s to a lower-middle income nation of over 2,000 USD per capita income by the end of 2014 (Thong et al., 2015). Moreover, due to the rapid export expansion (especially in the industries of rice, pepper, garments, and tea) and increased investment in private sector between 1990s and 2000s, Vietnam has become one of the fastest developing economies in the world (Thong et al., 2015).

However, this rapid industrialization and urbanization in the age of globalization have substantially affected the country's ecosystem and have caused many ecology environmental problems in Vietnam. The significant environmental challenges that Vietnam has to face are water pollution and overfishing, air pollution, deforestation and soil degradation, groundwater contamination, loss of biodiversity, degrading environment in big cities, and solid waste problems (Thong et al., 2015). In order to maintain economic growth while coping with these environmental issues, Vietnam needs to have a high-quality workforce that is well prepared to adapt quickly and effectively to the competitive work environment and challenges. This burden

puts substantial pressure on postsecondary education in Vietnam, which is responsible for training and producing well-equipped graduates who possess both appropriate hard and social skills needed to accelerate economic growth.

Vietnam's postsecondary education includes vocational education and university education. There are three levels of vocational education, which are all offered at junior colleges or vocational training centers: elementary level, intermediate level, and college level. The purpose of vocational education is to train workers and fulfill human resources needs in production, business and services. University education encompasses university level, master level and doctorate level. This type of education aims to produce qualified personnel, promote intelligence, and foster talents. University education also trains learners to comprehensively develop their virtue, mind, body, and aesthetic sense. Furthermore, university education helps learners to develop self-learning ability, increase creativity, easily adapt and adjust to the new working environment as well as to have knowledge and skills to build a successful career (Law No. 43/2019/QH14, 2019).

Problem Statement

Formal education takes students on a path towards obtaining specific technical skills in order to do jobs effectively after graduation. While these are the skills that are often listed on resumes for job applications, employers require the candidates to be not only technically smart but also interpersonally savvy. Therefore, when searching for potential workers, most employers tend to seek graduates or individuals who, apart from having required technical skills and adequate knowledge to perform the job competently, have a positive and proactive attitude as well as a willingness to learn (Kruss, 2004). Moreover, the graduates also need to be communicatively proficient, be able to solve problems, be capable of analyzing a situation from

multiple perspectives, and be adept at working in teams in order to be viewed as desirable job candidates in this post-industrial economy (Yorke & Harvey, 2005).

Nonetheless, despite the growing importance of social skills in graduate employability and workplace success, many employers and educators often complain about the lack of social skills among college graduates (Schulz, 2008). This problem is not only restricted to developing countries. Many industrialized nations around the world are also experiencing a deficiency in college graduates' social skills. From December 2005 to January 2006, the American Society for Training and Development conducted an online poll that generated a surprising result. In that survey, "96% of the total 369 respondents reported a social skills gap in their organizations" (Trung & Swierczek, 2009, pg. 565), a gap between the social skills employers require and those their employees currently have. Furthermore, the British Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) also reported in 2007 that employers find many students graduated from colleges and universities to be academically proficient but have a shortage in social skills: for instance, communication skills, teamwork skills or logical reasoning abilities (Schulz, 2008). Like other countries around the world, Vietnam also faces a social skills deficit among college graduates. Although Vietnam is one of the most dynamic emerging countries in Southeast Asia region, the lack of sufficient social skills in graduates has a significant effect on Vietnam's economy; it drives higher unemployment in Vietnam (Truong & Laura, 2015). Therefore, the social skills gap existed in the labor force not only poses a major challenge to Vietnamese policy makers but also draws enormous attentions and concerns from educational researchers and practitioners as well as from the parents and the students in Vietnam.

Traditionally, the main mission of higher education institutions in Vietnam was to train and prepare the workforce for a centrally planned economy (Tran, 2015). During this time, the

workers were required only to listen, obey, and follow orders, rather than to take initiative and develop creativity (Nguyen, 2009). Beginning in 1986, Vietnam launched a set of economic reforms known as *Doi Moi* to transform its economic system from a centrally planned model to a regulated market economy (Tran, 2015). After that structural change, the economy in Vietnam has grown rapidly, driven by productivity increases that came from the reallocation of jobs away from low productivity agriculture to higher productivity manufacturing and service works (Tran, 2010b). Since *Doi Moi*, the traditional "products" of Vietnam's higher education system, the passive learners and workers, seem to be no longer suitable for work (Pham, 2008).

The economic liberalization in 1986 has helped Vietnam to enter the world marketplace, from becoming a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1995 to entering the World Trade Organization in 2007 (Tran, 2015). Yet, maintaining economic growth while increasing integration into the global market is a significant challenge for Vietnam (Truong & Laura, 2015). This requires Vietnam to produce a more skilled and productive workforce to meet the needs of the international competitive market (Truong & Laura, 2015). Instead of demanding loyalty, hard-work, and obedience, employers in Vietnam began to look for college graduates who not only have impressive literacy and numeracy achievements but also possess great social skills, including teamwork skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills (Tran, 2015).

Nevertheless, many overseas researchers have indicated that postsecondary institutions in Vietnam have been unsuccessful in developing a competent and productive workforce, and this is due, primarily, to not effectively incorporating social skills instruction into curricula and the classrooms across the country (Mitchell, Skinner, & White, 2010). These researchers have also implied that there is an acute imbalance existing in the provision of hard and social skills learning in Vietnam's higher education system (Dang, 2009). Although social skills have been

increasingly perceived by employers as significantly important factors for graduate employability and career success, the absence of social skills training in colleges and universities have caused graduates to be ill-prepared for the workplace, which lead to dissatisfactions among employers and complications when seeking for potential hires (Truong & Laura, 2015).

Unfortunately, social skills training remains neglected in the Vietnamese curriculum, which not only leaves the needs of employers unmet but also creates difficulty for educational institutions to fulfill the demand of the labor market associated with the rapid economic growth in Vietnam (Trung & Swierczek, 2009). According to the IRED Institute of Education, 83% of postsecondary students in Vietnam have insufficient level of social skills, which results in an increasing number of graduates who cannot find jobs after college (50% in 2008 and 64% in 2011) (Giao Duc Vietnam, 2012). Additionally, reports also show that 50% of new hires in Vietnam have to be retrained at work because of their inadequate social skills (Truong & Laura, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

There has been extensive research internationally focusing on improving the competence of postsecondary students in order to meet demands of the competitive work environment (Kruss, 2004; Tran, 2010b; Truong & Swierczek, 2009). In the market economy specifically, the research has been concentrated on enhancing social skills for graduate employability and career success (Mitchell et al., 2010; Truong & Laura, 2015). Vietnam underwent a transition toward market oriented economy in 1986 (Tran, 2015). Therefore, equipping a qualified and skilled workforce has been a central part of Vietnam's effort to escalate economic growth and promote its economic modernization (Bodewig, Badiani-Magnusson, Macdonald, Newhouse, & Rutkowski, 2014).

Vietnam has one of the highest labor force participation rates (77% in 2018) compared to other nations in the world (The World Bank, 2019). Yet, the country currently experiences high unemployment rate because of the labor shortage that unsuccessfully fills the market-place demands of rapid economic development. Employers in Vietnam are actively seeking workers, but they have troubles in finding potential employees that match their skills needs. Despite impressive achievements in literacy and numeracy among Vietnamese employees or job seekers, many firms and organizations in Vietnam report having problems in finding and retaining workers with adequate social skills who can engage in higher-productivity activities (Bodewig et al., 2014).

Although Vietnam has been long aware of the social skills insufficiency among its college graduates, there is still very limited research on efforts to enhance graduate employability by understanding and promoting social skills development in Vietnam. Almost all of those social skills studies were conducted primarily from Vietnamese employers' or educators' perspectives. Very few investigations have been done on the self-perspectives of college graduates in regard to their own social skills performance. By examining and comprehending graduating students' social skills performance only from the lenses of employers or educators, the researchers will miss out on a very crucial piece of information. Employers, educators and students might not have the same views on the level of social skills being developed. Educators, or particularly academic personnel, needs to have a full understanding of the students' social skills performance from not only employers' perspectives but also from the viewpoint of the students themselves in order to be competent to develop and enhance social skills in students. Radoff, de la Harpe, Dalton, Tomas, and Lawson (2008) pointed out that "academic staff beliefs are critical and fundamental to any attempts at developing students' graduate attributes [social skills], since

academic staff are the custodians of the curriculum and the ones who determine what is taught and assessed" (pg.6).

As for students and employers, the students may not be aware of how differently they value their own social skills versus how the employers rate the level of their social skills and vice versa. Therefore, the primary purpose of the current investigation is to examine and compare the perceptions of Vietnamese college graduates and employers on graduates' social skills performance to identify whether there is a mismatch or a gap between college graduates' beliefs and employers' viewpoints on graduates' performance of social skills in the workplace. This research also explores if there are any differences in perceptions of social skills among graduates on multiple assigned variables on one hand, and if there are any differences in perceptions among employers on a different set of assigned variables on the other hand. However, this study does not target the entire college graduate population in Vietnam. Instead it focuses on a specific graduate group only, including those who have recently graduated from a Vietnamese college or university, have obtained a job, and have worked in the industry, all within one year. This group of students are identified as the "newly hired graduates" (NHGs); this term is used repeatedly throughout this paper.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Given the purposes of the current study, the following research questions were addressed:

Research Question 1: Do the employers' perceptions on NHGs' social skills performance differ from the perceptions of those NHGs on their own social skills performance?

Research Question 2: What factors, including gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education, predict the employers' perceptions on NHG's social skills performance?

Research Question 3: What factors, including gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions they graduated from predict the NHGs' perceptions on their own social skills performance?

Following were the research hypotheses for the current study:

Hypotheses 1: The employers' perceptions on NHGs' social skills performance are significantly different from the perceptions of those NHGs on their own social skills performance.

Hypotheses 2: The following factors, including gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education, all influence the employers' perceptions on NHG's social skills performance.

Hypotheses 3: The following factors, including gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions they graduated from, all influence the NHGs' perceptions on their own social skills performance.

Conceptual Framework

Success of a business is determined predominantly by its ability to adapt to continuous changes. Sustainable growth and profitability can only be achieved by organizations that realize the vital role of the employees' social skills development on their organizational performance (Meeks, 2017). In an increasingly complex and constantly changing business environment, employers require their employees not only to have specific occupational skills but also to possess basic, higher-order and effective social skills (Naveed, Jabeen, & Ullah, 2014). Naveed et al. (2014) argued that the rapid change of global economic environment has changed the employers' perception regarding the importance of social skills on employees' work performance. However, according to Tamkin and Hillage (1999), economic environment and labor market conditions are not the only factors that affect employers' hiring decisions.

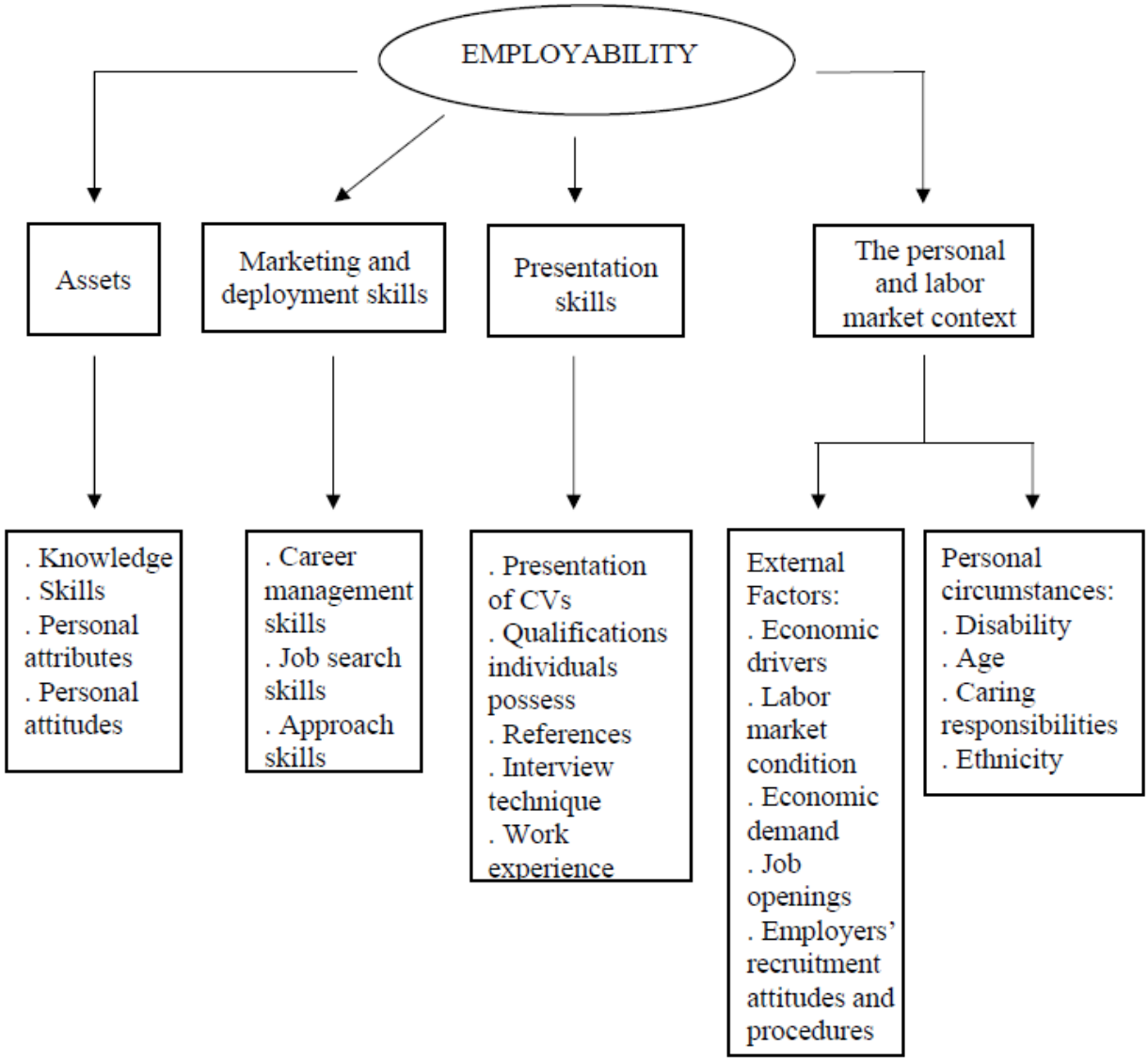
Tamkin and Hillage (1999) portrayed employability, in a very similar way to Hillage and Pollard (1998), as:

> The capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment. An individual's employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes he or she possesses, the way he or she uses those assets and presents them to employers and the context (e.g., personal circumstances and labor market environment) within which he or she seeks to work (pg. 11).

or in a shorter way as the capability of obtaining and retaining satisfactory work. Based on this definition, Tamkin and Hillage (1999) contended that an individual's (or a college graduate's) employability is influenced by four interrelated components: assets, marketing and deployment skills, presentation, and the personal and labor market context. A "holistic" framework of employability is developed based on Tamkin and Hillage's (1999) employability theory.

Figure 1.1

Tamkin and Hillage's (1999) Employability Framework Model



According to Tamkin and Hillage (1999), employability of college graduates depends

upon four primary components: the first three elements are corresponding to the concepts of production, marketing and sales, and the fourth element acts as the marketplace where graduates operate. Assets are those that include a person' knowledge, skills and attitudes (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999). When an individual possesses adequate knowledge, skills and attitudes, he/she needs to have the capability to deploy these abilities in different ways. Tamkin and Hillage (1999) described these correlated marketing and deployment skills as career management skills, job search skills, and approach skills.

Career management skills are commonly recognized as self-awareness (identifying occupational interests and abilities), opportunity awareness (understanding what job opportunities exist and their entry requirements), and decision-making skills (abilities to develop and execute a strategy to get you from where you are to where you want to be) (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999). Job search skills are the abilities to find suitable jobs by using both formal and informal networks (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999). Finally, approach skills are identified as being able to adapt to labor market developments, being realistic about labor market opportunities, and also being willing to relocate for work (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999). Once a person has appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to enter the workforce, he or she needs to have the abilities to demonstrate those assets to the job market in an accessible way, and those abilities are identified by Tamkin and Hillage (1999) as presentation skills. Employers and graduate recruiters regularly say they need candidates who possess adequate knowledge and skills, have positive attitudes, are more self-aware, and also understand exactly what they can offer to their chosen industry and how to deliver it (O'Riordan & Morrison, 2017). Hence, an applicant who is able to articulate his/her key graduate attributes and unique selling points will have advantage over other candidates and will clearly stand out in a competitive recruitment process.

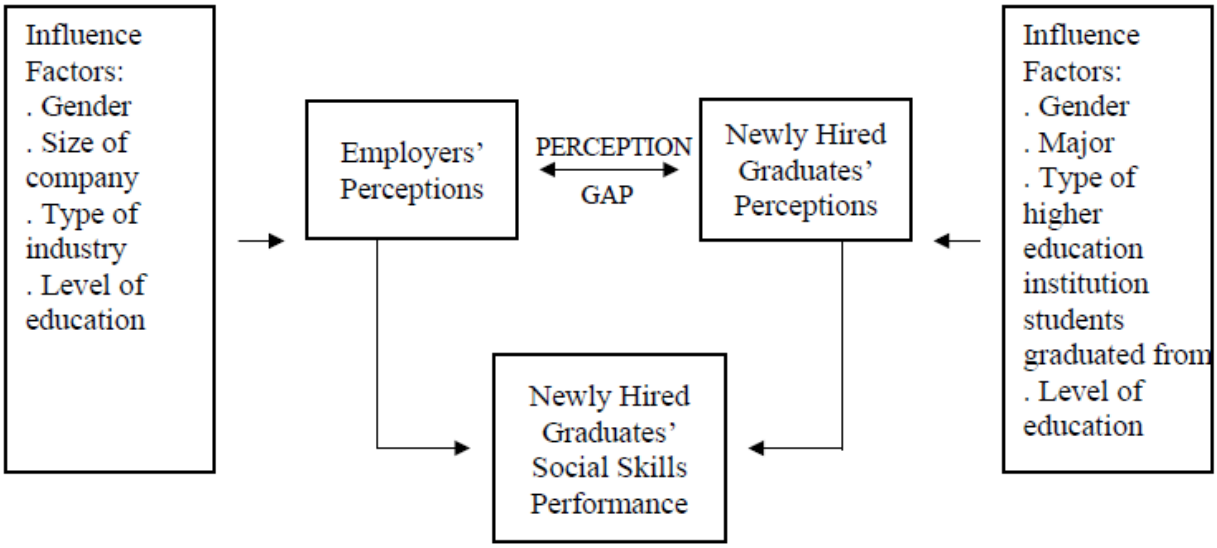
The last factor in Tamkin and Hillage's employability framework model is the ability to comprehend and actualize the employability assets based on external factors and personal circumstances of an individual (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999). External factors are the outside influences that affect employability. They can include the economic drivers, the condition of the labor market, the level of economic demand and job openings, and the employers' recruitment attitudes and procedures (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999). All these factors are considered economic factors and cannot be control by an individual for his or her employability (Naveed et al., 2014). On the other hand, a range of personal circumstances, such as disability, age, or illness can impact a person's ability to search for different employment opportunities as well as his or her employability after graduation (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999). Some of these factors may differ over time (an ex-offender will have a harder time in finding work right after their conviction compared to if the misdemeanor has happened a while ago), but some are more entrenched and cannot be changed (ethnicity or age) (Tamkin & Hillage, 1999).

Although Tamkin and Hillage (1999) argued that people's employability is affected by four factors, the current study focuses mainly on the first factor, particularly the "social" side of the skills component within this assets factor. The reason for choosing to analyze social skills is because this element has been recognized not only by Tamkin and Hillage (1999) but also by other later researchers (Sutan, 2002; Schulz, 2008, Mitchell et al., 2010; Truong & Laura, 2015) as an important determinant of employability, and enhancing graduate employability is one of the biggest challenges facing postsecondary education in Vietnam. To increase employability, graduating students need to know whether or not their social skills have matched employers' expectations. One way to find out is to compare how graduates rate their own social skills to how their employers perceive their actual performance on those social skills. Based on this objective,

a conceptual framework has been developed (figure 2) to be used as a guide for the current study, which utilized Tamkin and Hillage's (1999) theory on employability.

Figure 1.2

Conceptual Framework for Current Study



Significance of the Study

The main objective of the current study is to examine different perceptions, if any, of social skills for college graduates in Vietnam between employers and graduating students. According to Tran's (2013) research, she reported that many Vietnamese employers perceived newly graduates or potential employees in Vietnam as having a very low level (or sometimes even missing) of social skills. Accordingly, many employers are having increasing difficulty in finding qualified candidates for their open positions (Tran, 2013). This issue of the competence of tertiary graduates and the extent to which those graduates are knowledgeable, capable, and skilled to compete in Vietnam's labor marker persists. In addition, there has been lack of research on the association between social skills provided in the academic setting and those actually needed by industry and business.

Another important aspect of this study is that it addresses one of the most challenging issues encountered by the academic sector and labor market in Vietnam, which is the increasing unemployment rate. In Vietnam, there is currently a widening gap between the type of skills and level of expertise employers expect employees to have and the skills and expertise employees and job seekers actually possess. This disparity has aggravated the current dissatisfaction felt by Vietnamese employers when they tried to recruit and hire suitably trained graduates, even though the number of college graduates has proliferated rapidly over recent years (Truong, Laura, & Shaw, 2018). The higher level of discontent from employers means more jobs remain unfilled, which leads to a tide of rising unemployment (Truong et al., 2018). Consequently, the number of Vietnamese students unable to find a job after graduation has been growing rapidly and now accounts for approximately one fifth of the country's unemployed population, according to Deputy Minister Doan Mau Diep (Kien, 2018). To be more exact, in 2018, there were a total number of 1,061,500 unemployed people in Vietnam, and 197,700 of them were people with at least a college degree (Kien, 2018).

Out of all the potential Vietnamese employees, Pham (2013) discovered that two-thirds of them lack work-ready competencies. Skills limitation is regarded as one of the major barriers preventing Vietnamese graduates efficiently transitioning from college to the workplace (Tran & Swierczeck, 2009). However, the skills gap is not so much a shortage in the technical skills. Rather, one of the main reasons for the ill-prepared and unemployed college graduates is that their social skills are weak or completely absent (Tran & Swierczek, 2009). Many new Vietnamese graduates cannot take on their new job positions or maintain their employment after being hired because the level of their social skills competency is far below what the employers expect (Truong et al., 2018). Thus, it is actually social skills inadequacy, not technical skills

incompetence, that "paradoxically jeopardizes business growth and has created such a significant challenge for business development" (Truong et al., 2018, pg. 33). Therefore, the current research is designed to bring awareness as well as to clarify and emphasize the issues surrounding social skills and their role in graduate employability.

By analyzing both employers' and graduates' perceptions on social skills, the present study intends to not only make a contribution to the body of knowledge on graduate employability but also, practically, can be useful as a resource for academic personnel, employers, and students to gain a realistic understanding of this related issue. Lastly, this study also aims to provide empirical data on social skills assessment with the intention to help college graduates increase their capabilities to gain employment and succeed in their chosen occupations by recognizing the actual performance level of their social skills after college compared to how the employers evaluate their social skills in the workplace.

Operational Definitions of Terms

- *Employers:* Executive directors, directors, supervisors, human resource managers, managers of employees' affairs, or similar personnel who are responsible for recruiting, interviewing, and hiring employees for their companies.
- *Graduate employability:* "the capacity to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain employment if required" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p.2).
- *Newly hired graduates:* Group of students who have recently graduated from a college or university in Vietnam, have obtained a job, and have worked in the industry all within one year.
- *Social skills*: There are many different interpretations for the concept of social skills. However, the following definition is used for the purpose of this research:

> a set of skills, abilities, and personal attributes that can be used within the wide range of working environments where [college] graduates operate in throughout their lives. (Fraser, 2001, p. 1)

- *Technical skills:* In this study, technical skills are defined as the specific technical skills students need to do the job effectively after graduation.

Summary

The current study comprises five chapters. The first chapter is introductory to this research, including the problem statement, the purpose of the study. research questions and hypothesis, the conceptual framework, the significance of the study, operational definition of terms, conceptual framework, and a chapter summary. Chapter 2 is the review of the literature regarding Vietnamese higher education and social skills. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the study's research method. After that, process of data collection and analysis as well as findings of the study are presented in chapter 4, followed by a section of discussion and implications offered in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The main objective of the current study is to investigate and compare the perceptions of college graduates and employers about the graduates' social skills performance in Vietnam. Prior research has indicated that these so-called social skills are vital not only to graduate employability but also to career success in the workplace. To lay out and explain the nature of the current problem, after providing a brief history of education in Vietnam, this chapter is divided into four main parts that include the reviews of literatures in topics related to Vietnam's education system and social skills: the general system of Vietnam's education, social skills, the mismatch between education and industry in Vietnam, and lack of social skills and unemployment in Vietnam.

Vietnam in Brief

According to Do and Do (2014), Vietnam is considered as the third largest country in the area of Southeast Asia with more than 90 million people. This country is also recognized as having one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, with recent annual growth rates in real GPD of over 7% (Harman, Hayden, & Pham, 2010). Vietnam is also known to have an extensive tradition and culture of commitment to learning and a proud history of education (Do & Do, 2014). The historical roots of education in Vietnam can be traced back over a thousand years (London, 2011). This nation has had an organized educational system for more than 500 years (London, 2011). Growth and changes in Vietnam's education system over time have been influenced by a range of political events, including "the development of Confucian institutions, colonialism and anti-colonial struggle, post-colonial state formation, twentieth century wars, and the development and subsequent erosion of state-socialist institutions" (London, 2011, p.1).

However, the real transformation in Vietnam's education system did not occur until the development of a state-dominated market economy in 1986 driven by a comprehensive reform known as *Doi Moi* process (Tran, 2010b).

Doi Moi policy was engineered to transform Vietnam's centrally planned economy to become a market-led economy (Tran, 2010b). This transformation has caused a rapid and dramatic economic growth in Vietnam (Tran, 2010b). New industries emerged after the reform (Nguyen, Luu, & Trinh, 2016). More foreign-owned businesses and private enterprises were encouraged to be opened (Nguyen et al., 2016). Furthermore, the education system in Vietnam has also been strongly influenced by this 1986 economic liberalization. The number of colleges and universities in both public and private sector were increased constantly in order to produce more qualified personnel to meet the increasing demands for educated knowledge workforce of the new economy (Tran, 2010b). However, not only there was a rapid expansion in the number of postsecondary institutions, but the higher education curriculum also had to be altered to add in new skills training since the needs for human resources with new management skills (related to new private market conditions) and high technical competences are risen (Nguyen et al., 2016).

The General System of Education in Vietnam

Many of the operational and organizational features of Vietnam's education system are similar to those of other nations, while other attributes are distinctive and can only be seen in Vietnam. Although there has been a recent movement towards greater decentralization, the administrative organization of Vietnam's education system is still fairly centralized and hierarchically bureaucratized (London, 2011). In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is the main agency responsible for all education matters, including managing human resources and education budget, formulating laws and policies, and drafting education

planning and strategies (London, 2011). MOET also collaborates with other line ministries to determine the content of curricula and investments in education (London, 2011).

However, at the local level, matters related to education are not overseen by MOET. Instead, they are administered by Departments of Education at the province level and Offices of Education at the district or communes' level (Cobbe, 2011). Departments of Education are responsible for implementing national policies and managing resources as well as oversee upper-secondary schools, while Offices of Education are accountable to the provincial Departments of Education but have a direct oversight of lower-secondary and primary schools (Cobbe, 2011).

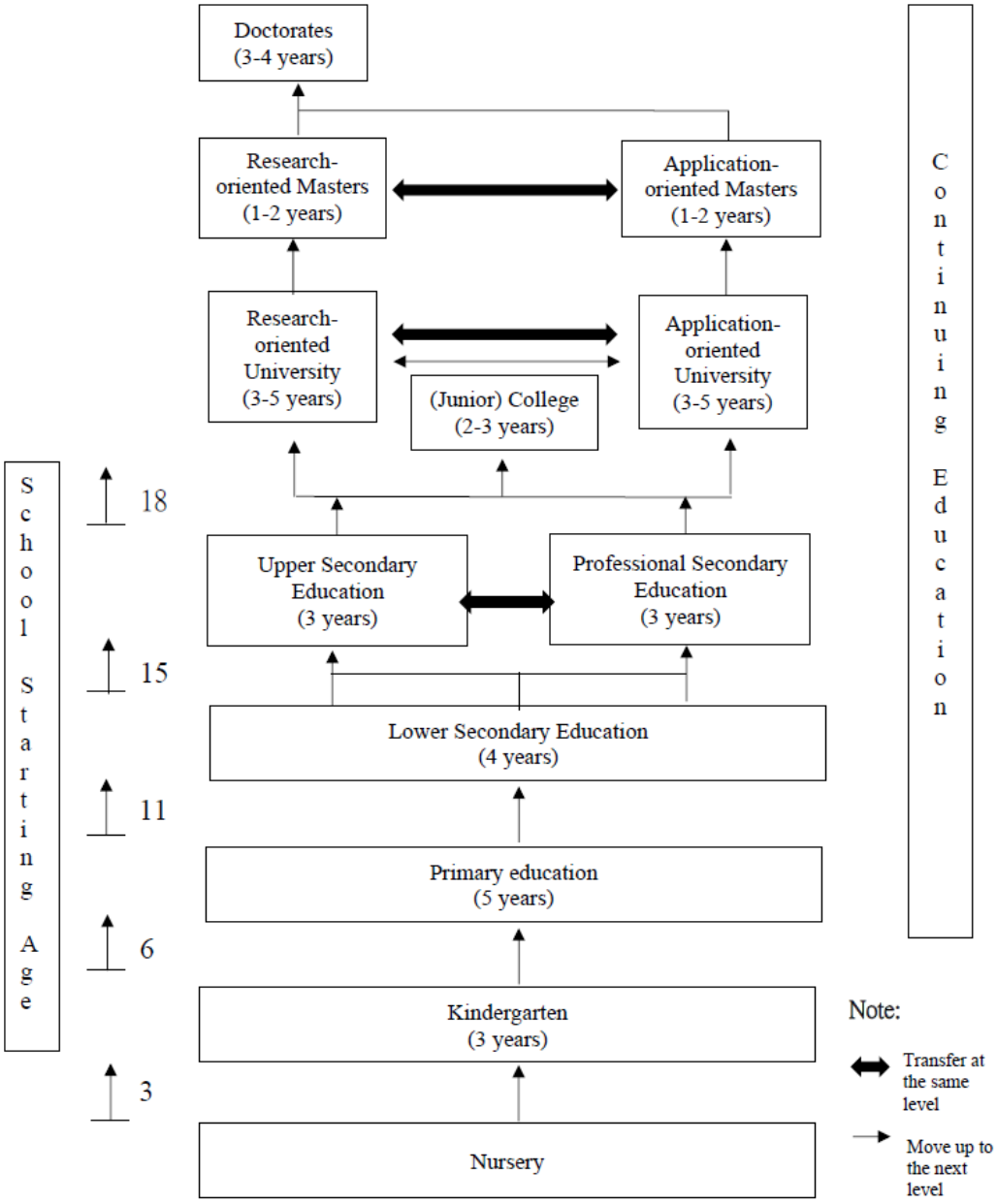
According to London (2011), "Vietnam's education system is a sprawling complex of thousands of linked organizations operating in diverse local circumstances" (p. 19). Even though the formal operation and organization of Vietnam's education system are quite different than those of America, which has a decentralized approach to education, the country's educational structure is broadly consistent with that found in America with only a few slight distinctions. Figure 2.1 portrays both the structure and age-appropriate order of Vietnam's education system.

According to this structure, Vietnam's education system is an extensive network of state-run schools for students from roughly 3 months old to college-age. The academic system consists of eight categories: nursery, kindergarten, lower-secondary education (or known as middle school), upper-secondary education (or also referred to as high school), university/junior college, masters, and doctorates. Alongside the academic system is the continuing education for those students who want to attend school and work at the same time. Since the economic liberalization in 1986, the number of students and schools in Vietnam has increased dramatically and constantly. By 2016, the country's education system (including all public and private schools, colleges, and universities) accounted for approximately 1.5 million personnel and over 20

million students, which is about one-fifth of Vietnam's population (GSOV, 2010).

Figure 2.1

Structure of Vietnam's Education System



Adapted and translated from Decision No. 1981/QD-TTg), 2016.

In the space of a few years (2015-16), Vietnam had a total number of 14,513 pre-primary schools (both kindergartens and preschools), 15,052 primary schools, 10,155 lower-secondary

schools, 2,399 upper-secondary schools, 773 combined primary and lower-secondary schools, 420 combined lower- and upper-secondary schools, as well as 357 public colleges and universities and 88 non-public colleges and universities (GSOV, 2010). This expansion in term of number of schools from all levels was seen in both state and private sector. Yet, the most notable transformation of Vietnam's education system had to be in the private provision. Before 1986, there was no non-public colleges and universities allowed to be opened (Pham & Fry, 2002). However, after the introduction of the open policy, Vietnam has launched a more flexible education policy to mobilize diverse sources of investment for education and training since national funds for this sector were limited (Pham & Fry, 2002). Without a mixed system of public and non-public postsecondary institutions to train and provide competent workers, many needs and demands would be unfulfilled, adversely impacting both equity and efficiency (Pham & Fry, 2002). Accordingly, the number of privately owned colleges and universities grew from 0 to 88 by 2016 from the influences of the reform (GSOV, 2010).

Pre-Primary Education

Pre-primary education in Vietnam, which is also known as early childhood care and education (ECCE), provides nurturing, caring and learning services for children under 6 years old (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). ECCE includes two levels: nursery and kindergarten. Nursery schools accept infants starting from 3 months to 3 years old, whereas kindergarten entrance age is between 3 to 5 years old.

Based on the Education Law issued in 2005, ECCE units in Vietnam are formed under the authority of different agencies: District People's Committee for public units, communities for people-founded units and individuals for private units (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). The forming of public ECCE units, under the supervision of District People's Committee, is only permitted in

poor communes and ethnic minority areas or socio-economically disadvantaged locations. As for the people founded ECCE units, they are mainly seen in rural areas (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). People-founded ECCE units usually receive resource-related assistance from local authorities as well as helps and contributions from residents in the community for establishment of the unit, equipment purchases, and all other operating costs (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). The last type of ECCE units is private units, which can be opened by any individuals. Government in Vietnam always encourages people to open private ECCE units by providing space, rental land or physical facilities for the unit as well as giving tax or credit preferences to those who open these types of units (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008).

Primary Education

For decades, primary education was the essential focus of education policy in Vietnam (London, 2011). The Constitution and Education Law demanded that primary education should be compulsory and free to all citizens (London, 2011). Hence, in 2008, the Vietnamese government announced that primary education had been "universalized" and that all Vietnamese children could attend primary education for free (London, 2011). In Vietnam, primary education consists of five grades. After kindergarten, children at the age of 6 will start enrolling in first grade and will, without repeating any grades, complete primary school at age 11. Subjects being taught in primary education include mathematics, Vietnamese, moral education, arts, natural and social sciences, physical education, as well as geography and history in Grades 4 and 5 (Trines, 2017). The curriculum at this education level emphasizes on developing students' mathematics skills and civics as well as rote memorization (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008; Trines, 2017). Primary education also aims to provide students with all the basic skills and knowledge required for entrance into the next education level, which is lower-secondary schools.

Secondary Education

There are two levels of secondary education in Vietnam: lower-secondary and upper-secondary. Every pupil who completes primary school in Vietnam has a choice to either "continue their [studies] in a four-year lower-secondary education cycle or enroll in short-term vocational training programs (Trines, 2017, pg. 11). Lower-secondary education begins in sixth grade and ends in ninth grade. The curriculum includes foreign language, Vietnamese, natural sciences, mathematics, civics, geography, technology, history, arts, computer science, and physical education (Trines, 2017).

Upper-secondary education in Vietnam is non-compulsory and encompasses Grades 10 to 12. Access to this educational level is very competitive and examination based. Nevertheless, entry into public upper-secondary education depends on rigorous entrance examinations. For those students who do not score high enough in the entrance exams to be admitted into public upper-secondary schools in general track, they can seek admission to expensive private schools or attend professional upper-secondary programs (Trines, 2017). Professional secondary education is a program that combines vocational/technical training with general high school education (Trines, 2017). This type of education lasts three to four years and usually requires passing an entrance examination for admission. After completing either a general upper-secondary education or professional secondary programs, students must pass a national high school graduation examination and use this score to apply for university education. However, most students in the technical or vocational track usually continue their education at junior colleges instead of attending universities.

Higher Education

Historical Context

Vietnam has a long and proud history of higher education, dating back to the eleventh century when the Royal College in Vietnam was built in the Temple of Literature (Goyette, 2012). This first university was established for the sons of high dignitaries to receive moral education and training (Pham, 1995). During French colonialism, which conquered Vietnam in the latter half of the 19th century, higher education system in Vietnam was very limited and little invested (Vu, Le, & Giang, 2010). From 1945 to the late 1980s, tertiary education system was modeled after the former Soviet Education system, where all higher education institutions were small and mono-disciplinary (Vu et al., 2010; Tran, 2012). Specialized universities typically concentrate on a single are of study or subject of focus, including economics, law, fine arts, engineering, education, foreign languages, etc. This type of mono-disciplinary institutions focused on training and providing skillful workforce to meet the projected labor requirements of each sector.

After 1986, when Vietnamese government mandated *Doi Moi* (open door) policy to promote the nation's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market oriented one, Vietnam has undergone drastic changes in both economic and social aspects (Vu et al., 2010). "These changes, on one hand, have facilitated and promoted the development of higher education system; on the other hand, they have exacerbated the pressures on the education system in general and on the higher education system in particular" (Vu et al., 2010, p. 5) in order to increase access and provide more college education opportunities to students in Vietnam. Many specialized institutions under the pre-*Doi Moi* (renovation) policy have taken on a multi-disciplinary focus in the last several years. More multi-disciplinary universities are on the rise from the influences of the new policy. Additionally, Vietnamese government has allowed and even encouraged more private and foreign investors to open colleges and universities (Pham

& Fry, 2002). By doing this, not only Vietnam can increase college access for students but the country can also ensure that they produce enough proficient workers to meet the demands of new economy.

Current Structure

Postsecondary education in Vietnam is comprised of four levels: junior college, university, master and doctorate (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). College-level training includes 2- to 3-year courses that are available for either upper-secondary or professional secondary graduates (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). These courses are mainly offered by junior colleges, and about two-thirds of degree-granting junior colleges in Vietnam specialize in some types of vocational training (Vu et al., 2010). However, the college-level training will only last 1 to 2 years if the graduates are in the same training discipline or area (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008). In addition to the short-cycle college programs, there are long-cycle bachelor degree programs of 4 to 6 years duration depending on the field of study, which are available for upper-secondary or professional secondary graduates and are offered at universities (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2008; Vu et al., 2010). The length of the program will be reduced to either 2 ½ -4 years at secondary level or 1 ½ -2 years at college level for those graduates who have the same field study (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2010). After obtaining a baccalaureate, university graduates can pursue postgraduate education either at the master level for 1-2 years or at the doctoral level for 3-4 years, depending on the academic disciplines and forms of study (Vu et al., 2010).

Student Enrollment

The higher education system in Vietnam, during the past decades, has experienced a rapid expansion and has moved from elite to mass higher education. Table 2.1 illustrates the prompt development of Vietnam's higher education system between 1987 and 2009 (Vu et al.,

2010). According to Table 2.1, there were only 101 public postsecondary institutions in 1987. Private higher education had not been established at that time. After two decades, this number significantly increased to 376 public institutions and 81 private institutions by 2009. Most private HEIs in Vietnam are profit-driven and demand absorbing institutions (Nguyen, 2016). These institutions provide access to postsecondary education, but at a lower level of campus size, numbers of students and faculty, or academic quality than those offered by their public counterparts (Nguyen, 2016).

Table 2.1

The Swift Development of the Higher Education System in Vietnam

	1987	1997	9/2009
Number of HE Institutions	101	126	376
Non-public HE Institutions	0	15	81
Number of students	133.136	715.231	1.719.499

As for the number of students, there was also a substantial increase of approximately 1.5 million students attended both public and non-public institutions between 1987 and 2009 (GSOV, 2010). By 2015, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions in Vietnam has grown to over 2 million (GSOV, 2010). Furthermore, out of those 376 institutions in the public higher education sector, fourteen of them have been dominated and designated as "key universities" (Hayden & Lam, 2007). These institutions are generally quite large, even by international standards (Hayden & Lam, 2007). The reason why these fourteen schools are considered as "key universities" is because they are the country's expectation in leading the process of modernization of higher education in Vietnam, particularly by promoting a strong research capability and culture (Hayden & Lam, 2007). Furthermore, these "key universities" enroll almost one-third of all postsecondary students in Vietnam (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

Social Skills

Definitions and Characteristics

Skill has always been an elusive concept. In fact, the concept of skill has grown even more complex with the increasing prominence of social skills (Grugulis & Vincent, 2009). With the new developments in the workplace that require more than just the knowledge and abilities to perform assigned tasks, the shift from technical skills to personal attributes, as Hillage, Regan, Dickson, and McLoughlin (2002) pointed out, has become more prevailing. These developments include the growth of privatization, marketization, and use of new management techniques in the public sector (Katz, 1997), the beginning of lean manufacturing with its emphasis on problem-solving and teamwork (Shibata, 2001), and, finally, the growth of service sector (Noon & Blyton, 2007).

Table 2.2

Terminologies Used to Refer to Soft Skills

Country	Term Used
Australia	Key competencies
Canada	Strategy for prosperity
Denmark	Process independent qualifications
Finland	Framework for evaluating educational outcomes
France	Transferable competencies
Germany	Key qualifications
Italy	Transversal competencies
Malaysia	Soft skills
Netherlands	Core Competencies
New Zealand	Essential skills
Singapore	Critical enabling skills
South Africa	Critical cross field outcomes
Switzerland	Trans-disccciplinary goals
United Kingdom	Interpersonal skills and employability skills
United States	Necessary skills and workplace know-how skills

Social skills are, at least rhetorically, considered the most in-demand job skills that employers are looking for in new employees (Hillage et al., 2002). However, these types of skills are harder to observe and more challenging to measure than technical skills because of their tacit nature. Also, literature review conducted for the current study has showed that there was no common or globally accepted definition for the term "social skill." This was because each discipline, educational sector or country has different perception of what constituted a social skill; hence, they define social skill differently according to their own needs (Kechagias, 2011). Not only do social skills have divergent definitions, but according to Helena and Thomas (2013), they are also known by different names across the globe as shown in Table 2.2.

Although there may be a large number of definitions found in literature regarding the concept of social skills, most of them emphasize that all types of social skills are capable of being learned and developed (Kechagias, 2011). Social skills, according to Kechagias (2011), are intra- and inter-personal skills that are imperative for social participation, personal development, and workplace success. Social skills are also defined by Wilhelm, Logan, Smith, and Szul (2002) as the non-technical skills, abilities, and attributes that are needed to be able to function efficiently in a specific work environment. Furthermore, Kantrowitz (2005) viewed social skills as human, behavioral, or interpersonal skills needed to effectively apply knowledge and technical skills in the workplace. Despite all the differences and similarities in how social skills are described, these skills share a common purpose and focus on one thing, which is to improve and enhance participation in learning, personal development, and success in employment (Gibb, 2014).

In this research, social skills are defined as "a set of skills, abilities, and personal attributes that can be used within the wide range of working environments where [college]

graduates operate in throughout their lives" (Fraser, 2001, p. 1). Although this definition of social skills provided by Fraser (2001) is very similar to other definitions, it particularly focuses on the population of college graduates when describing about soft skills. Since the present study aims to examine the soft skills of college graduates in Vietnam, Fraser's soft skills definition seems the most relevant for this study; hence, this definition is selected to describe the subject soft skills in the current research. In the workplace environment, both technical and social skills are essential and needed to succeed in a particular professional job. Technical skills, defined by Robles (2012), are technical expertise and knowledge required to perform a specific task. Furthermore, technical skills can also typically be learned and developed through training and practice in a particular field Chiu, Mahat, Rashid, Razak, & Omar, 2016.

Social skills, by contrast, are interpersonal qualities that are perceived as skills of employability (Chiu et al., 2016). Unlike technical skills, social skills are not taught well in school, but they can be self-educated and developed through trial and error (Chiu et al., 2016). In other words, technical skills act as tools, techniques, and processes to analyze, predict, or perform the technical parts of a project, while social skills are seen as the abilities to deal with human issues or people parts of that project. In recruitment and employability, technical skills and social skills are both equally crucial criteria, but fulfilling only the technical skills criteria should not be the major concern since social skills are vital as well in employment success. Consequently, a person needs to possess not only competent technical skills but also a set of refined social skills in order to successfully gain and maintain employment.

Types of Social Skills

There is a considerable amount of research conducted on social skills around the world. However, most of those investigations focus on acknowledging which social skills are important

for both employment and career success. For instance, the most critical transferable social skills that influence employability of college graduates, according to Andrews and Higson (2008), are reliability, professionalism, flexibility, critical thinking skills, the ability to handle pressure, communication skills, self-confidence, creativity, willingness to learn, time-management skills, reliability, and responsibility. A few years later, Robles (2012) identified the top 10 most desired social skills that employers are looking for in the workplace, including communication, teamwork, professionalism, flexibility, work ethic, integrity, courtesy, responsibility, positive attitude, and social skills.

After conducting an extensive literature review, the current study noted that there were numerous scholars in different parts of the world focused on examining what are considered important social skills perceived by employers. The results that these scholars received from their assessments were different but also somewhat similar, as illustrated in Table 2.3. Social skills in this table were first ranked based on the frequency in which they were mentioned in different studies, then they were ordered alphabetically. Some of the skills below could perhaps be combined, but they were kept separate to keep true to the original source. Finally, the authors were also arranged in ascending order based on the year of publication, from left to right.

In 2018, a group of researchers from Australia also performed a study analyzing the integral role of social skills in business and career success in Vietnam (Truong et al., 2018). The authors surveyed 15 representative employers from many of the largest business enterprises in Vietnam and 577 Vietnamese educators to explore the prominence of social skills and the particular important social skills for career success. After collecting and analyzing data from the respondents, Truong et al. identified 19 social skills that were viewed as critical in Vietnamese workplace by the employers.

Table 2.3

List of Important Social Skills According to Different Sources from Literature

	McLaughlin (1992)	Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle (1997	Stasz (1997)	NCIHE (1997)	Kelly (2001)	Russell, Russell, & Tastle (2005)	Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006)	Gewertz (2007)	Bancinto & Zevalkink (2007)	Andrews & Higson (2008)	Shakir (2009)	Young & Chapman (2010)	Azim, Gale, Lawlor-Wright, Kirkham, Khan, & Alam (2010)	Gonzalez-Morales, De Antonio, & Garcia (2011)	Kechagias (2011)	Doyle (2011)	Robles (2012)
Communication skills	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Teamwork	X		X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Problem-solving skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X					X	
Work ethic/Integrity	X						X				X	X	X		X		X
Leadership							X		X		X	X	X	X			
Professionalism							X			X		X	X		X		X
Interpersonal relations						X			X	X		X					X
Responsibility/Reliability	X							X		X					X		X
Critical Thinking								X			X	X		X			
Flexibility									X	X					X		X
Life-long learning	X			X							X	X					
Negotiation skill									X			X	X			X	
Self-management					X		X			X		X					
Conflict management									X				X	X			
Creativity							X			X						X	

(table continues)

	McLaughlin (1992)	Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle (1997	Stasz (1997)	NCIHE (1997)	Kelly (2001)	Russell, Russell, & Tastle (2005)	Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006)	Gewertz (2007)	Bancinto & Zevalkink (2007)	Andrews & Higson (2008)	Shakir (2009)	Young & Chapman (2010)	Azim, Gale, Lawlor-Wright, Kirkham, Khan, & Alam (2010)	Gonzalez-Morales, De Antonio, & Garcia (2011)	Kechagias (2011)	Doyle (2011)	Robles (2012)
Decision-making						X						X		X			
Self-confidence							X			X		X					
Time-management/Punctuality							X			X						X	
Courtesy							X										X
Emotional intelligence									X							X	
Information management skill	X				X												
Positive attitude					X												X
Sense of humor				X												X	
Willingness to learn							X			X							
Adaptability skill	X																
Anger management																X	
Business etiquette																X	
Client management skill														X			
Cross-cultural relationships								X									
Forgiveness					X												
Good manners				X													
Handling pressure										X							
Interviewing skill																X	

(table continues)

	McLaughlin (1992)	Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle (1997	Stasz (1997)	NCIHE (1997)	Kelly (2001)	Russell, Russell, & Tastle (2005)	Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006)	Gewertz (2007)	Bancinto & Zevalkink (2007)	Andrews & Higson (2008)	Shakir (2009)	Young & Chapman (2010)	Azim, Gale, Lawlor-Wright, Kirkham, Khan, & Alam (2010)	Gonzalez-Morales, De Antonio, & Garcia (2011)	Kechagias (2011)	Doyle (2011)	Robles (2012)
Listening skills				X													
Multi-disciplinary thinking skill								X									
Networking skill																X	
Numerical reasoning skill					X												
Patience																X	
Personal qualities			X														
Planning, Organizing												X					
Resilience				X													
Self-awareness					X												
Self-control	X																
Self-motivation		X															
Social skill					X												
Study skill					X												
Telephone etiquette																X	
Trustworthiness	X																
Understanding work culture												X					

The 19 identified social skills are very similar to all the social skills that were regarded as essential for employment and career success by different scholars across the globe. The social skills were ranked according to their importance level (Table 2.4). Also, some of the skills that were rated as making a similarly critical contribution by the employers were clustered together and explicated in the same group.

Table 2.4

List of Vital Social Skills in Vietnamese Workplace Perceived by Employers

Rank	Social Skills
1	Communication
2	Teamwork
3	Flexibility Customer Service
4	Interpersonal Skills
5	Marketing Positive Attitudes Responsibility
6	Negotiation Business Ethics Critical Thinking
7	Market Research and Analysis Time-management Problem-solving Interpersonal Relationship Professionalism
8	Self-management Leadership
9	Technological Competence

Source: Truong et al. (2018).

The Importance of Social Skills

As the workforce constantly evolves with the rise of globalization and technology in the twenty-first century, so do in-demand skill sets. Kilcoyne and Redmann (2006) both agreed that the advent of globalization, technology, and flattening organizational hierarchy are all factors

that have altered traditional employment. On top of that, the emergence of digitalization has further complicated the economy as well as the constantly changing workforce not only in the US but also across the world (Timm, 2005). In this ever-evolving work environment, the traditional skills needed by yesterday's workers are no longer sufficient. Instead, an individual must have more than just superior technical skills to be capable of succeeding in the workplace. Consequently, employers are now looking for skills that go beyond qualifications and experiences while searching for potential employees. Yet, Kilcoyne and Redmann (2006) revealed that an increasing number of employers have voiced their concerns about the shortage of social skills possessed by new graduates and job seekers in the current workforce.

Social skills, according to James and James (2004), are imperative not only to the employers but also employees as well. In the Policies Commission for Business and Economic Education Statement Number 67 (PCBEE Statement No. 67, n.d.), the National Business Education Association (NBEA) stated that:

> Educators have traditionally been successful in teaching the technical skills. While technical skills are effective tools to accomplish a task, they must be complemented by the social skills to enhance productivity. In the high-performance workplace, it is the human factors that impact the ability of the organization to succeed. (p. 1)

More importantly, there has been an abundant literature accumulated to show that the acquisition of social skills is far more critical to graduates and job seekers in education, business, and professional settings than has previously been acknowledged. Hommerichhousen (2002), Watts and Watts (2009), and Klaus (2010) concurred that social skills contribute for as much as 85% of a person's success, whether in life or at work, whereas technical skills or technical expertise account only for the remaining 15%. In today's workforce, simply being technically competent is inadequate for success. Graduates and job seekers must learn and develop social skills as well as know how to apply these skills to appropriate situations if they want to improve both their

professional and personal life (PCBEE Statement No. 67, n.d.).

In the working world, social skills along with technical skills play a very crucial role. Social skills are personal attributes that enable employees to interact well with others (Perrault, 2004). Technical skills, on the other hand, are specific capabilities that an individual can possess to efficiently perform a particular activity (Robles, 2012). For employment, technical skills may look impressive on the job seekers' resume, but social skills are what make the potential employees stand out and set them apart from the many candidates who have similar knowledge and expertise. In most jobs or occupations, technical skills alone are not enough to lead to career success. For instance, a salesperson with an unrivalled knowledge of his products or clients will have little to no success if he doesn't have the interpersonal skills needed to close deals and retain customers. Almost careers require at least some social skills to make the technical skills valuable. Moreover, strong social skills also promote and ensure a healthy, collaborative and productive work environment, which are all vital qualities for organizational success in this increasingly competitive global market. Therefore, possessing social skills can make a difference when it comes down to the hiring decisions or when an employer has to choose between candidates for a position.

Social skills are identified by employers as the "number one differentiator" (Sutton, 2002, p.40) for job applicants in all types of industries. As for many organizations, especially high-performing ones, hiring individuals with refined social skills is instrumental in retaining or even enhancing their competitive edge (Glenn, 2008). Hemby and Crews (2005) observed that employers become very selective during hiring process when the economy is slow. Only the best and brightest individuals will be sought and hired during that time; yet, the largest constituent of the hired group, according to Hemby and Crews's (2005) findings, is made up of those with a

strong foundation of social skills. As a result, job applicants who possess not only superior technical abilities but also refined social skills emerge as the preferred candidates or desired employees for many employers.

In the past, analytically minded employees were capable of completing all their tasks and responsibilities by using only technical skills and having little to no interaction with others (Mitchell, 2008). However, after the paradigm shift in the twenty-first century workforce, employees were forced to be well furnished with social skills (Ganzel, 2001). Glenn (2003a) contended that the high-performance workforce in the twenty-first century often requires workers who are not only able to complete basic tasks but also able to interact with others efficiently and professionally. Employers are now focusing more on the demonstration of interpersonal skills instead of technical knowledge; hence, having solely technical skills and expertise can no long ensure getting the best job in this constantly changing and high-performance economy (Towner, 2002).

Furthermore, Timm (2005) discovered that many businesses want to recruit and retain paramount employees either within the country or worldwide in order to gain competitive advantage. This does not mean that having social skills and no hard job-specific abilities are considered desirable for employers. Job applicants in the twenty-first century are still being judged and evaluated on their experiences and technical skills; however, qualities like having good communication skills or being able to work effectively with others on team projects are significantly vital for employability as well (Towner, 2002). Timm (2005) also asserted that individuals who are flexible and willing to adapt to changes will be highly sought after by employers. Furthermore, because people with the right mix of hard and social skills can affect the organizational performance or profitability, many companies are desperately searching and

wanting to hire these types of candidates (Towner, 2002).

From a study conducted by Truong et al. (2018) on the important role of social skills in career success in Vietnam, the employers displayed a high level of agreement on the vital role of social skills in the workplace. They also emphasized that social skills are imperative for any employee in this constantly changing labor market, regardless of any specific type of occupations (Truong et al., 2018). As for how much hard and social skills contribute to career success, the employers expressed different views. Twenty eight percent of the employers who were surveyed in the study claimed that technical skills and social skills have an equal contribution to business and career success (Truong et al., 2018). They went on to explain that both types of skills have their own assets: "hard skills contribute to the growth of an individual's technical expertise, while social skills contribute to the success of an individual, both in getting access to a job that he/she qualifies for and also in gaining success reflected by advancement in his/her career ladder (Truong et al., 2018, p. 1557). Nevertheless, 72% of the other surveyed employers asserted that social skills play a more crucial role in attaining career success than technical skills do (Truong et al., 2018). The study also interviewed Vietnamese educators along with other employers on the concept of social skills, and the results showed that most of the educators in Vietnam (72%) had the same view as the employers and rated social skills as very important factors in achieving business and career success (Truong et al., 2018).

Social Skills and Investment in Human Capital

In the early 60s, the concept of human capital was still under attack and experienced vast criticism (Layard, 1971). It was not until 1971 when economist Theodore W. Schultz published his book, *Investment in Human Capital: The Role of Education and Research*, that this concept was widely accepted by many economists (Layard, 1971). Human capital was defined by

Thurow (1970) as the knowledge, skills, and creativity of an individual. The concept of human capital has been introduced and utilized by many economists to help explain major problems encountered in economic analysis, such as investment problem, growth problem, aggregation problem, and income distribution (Thurow, 1970).

According to Thurow (1970), the three components of natural resources that compose a part of a nation's wealth are labor, land, and finally physical capital. However, other researchers (Welch, 1970; Schultz, 1971; Becker, 1992) including Thurow (1970) himself have argued and agreed that investing in human capital has benefits over physical capital, in which human capital investment increases national income. For that reason, human capital plays a major role in enhancing national economic development. Based on a study conducted by Barro (1991) to 98 countries between the period of 1960 and 1986, the results showed that the growth rate of real GDP per capita is positively associated with human capital. A year before this study, Becker, Glaeser, and Murphy (1990) found empirically supported implications that countries' accumulation of human capital generates economic growth. Additionally, Ethrlich (2007) also indicated that human capital is the engine of growth, and its accumulation can be enabled by public investment in individuals' education and trainings.

Overall, investing in human capital, according to many economists and researchers, is essential for sustainable economic development (Thurow, 1970; Welch, 1970; Schultz, 1971; Becker, Glaeser, & Murphy, 1990; Barro, 1991; Becker, 1992; Ethrlich, 2007), and social skills are considered as part of an individual's human capital (Andreas, 2018). Therefore, learning social skills should be considered as a major part of human capital investment. Obtaining and enhancing social skills not only benefit individuals, but also organizations and even nations. Individuals with strong social skills have a greater advantage in seeking and gaining jobs.

Employees with a refined social skill set often have better work performance, which can lead to increased productivity for the organizations. More employed people and higher numbers of well-preforming companies both stimulate economic growth of the nations. Consequently, social skills development and human capital investment are highly correlated. Incorporating more social skill trainings into school curriculum is one way many countries can invest in their human capital in order to boost their national income. Likewise, constantly learning and practicing social skills in the classroom so that individuals can possess a polished set of social skills after graduation can help them significantly in their future's job acquisition process and work performance.

Vietnam is one of the many developing countries that depends on human capital to improve the nation's wealth and enhance the quality of life. Hence, the country relies heavily on the higher education system to prepare a highly skilled and well-educated workforce to supply the demands of the labor market. During the period of 2000-2011, Vietnam experienced high economic growth, which helped the country achieve large improvements in human capital development (OECD, 2013). The labor force portion in the unskilled labor positions dropped by 10%, whereas the portion of the occupations that require the highest level of skills nearly tripled (OECD, 2013).

Despite these accomplishments, Vietnam is still facing a challenge in providing qualified workers for the labor market. The education and training system in Vietnam has actually not been functioning efficiently to meet the new economy's demands for skilled labor. According to the employer surveys performed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a majority of the surveyed firms reported to have problems in recruiting new workers due to most applicants lacked required skills, particularly social skills (OECD,

2013). These surveys also indicated that when hiring new employees, employers evaluated their job candidates' social skills (OECD, 2013). However, since social skills have not been a focus of the education and training programs in Vietnam, many employers had a hard time finding qualified candidates with an adequate set of social skills (OECD, 2013). This demonstrates that social skills are significantly important for students' career and life success in Vietnam, and these successes in life and at work of the students will in turn contribute to economic growth of the country.

The Mismatch between Education and Industry in Vietnam

The notion of preparing students for work and training for specific skills as the main mission of postsecondary education has long been established in Vietnam (Ta & Winter, 2010). To date, the fundamental mission and goal of Vietnamese colleges and universities still focus on producing an educated and skilled labor force for the industry (Tran, 2006). In Vietnam, the postsecondary education has the responsibility to train students for professional knowledge and skills to help them gain employment after college and also at the same time fulfill the demands of the labor market (Pham, 2008). For that reason, the structure of postsecondary education system in Vietnam has always been primarily designed to satisfy the needs of the employment market (George, 2010).

Education, particularly higher education, in Vietnam has been regarded as an investment, instead of a tool for empowerment and liberation as seen in the US and Europe (Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005). From the government's standpoint, investment in education must be considered as one of the key targets for development investment (MOET, 1995). Dr. Hac Pham, the former Vice-Minister for Education of Vietnam, also presented and highlighted this goal very clearly in his book:

> Investment in education is investment in development, being the fundamental investment in the socio-economic strategy. Subsequently, especially as from 1991, and since the fourth Plenum of the party Central Committee in 1993, the view has become clearer and education is regarded as part of the socio-economic infrastructure (Pham, 1998, p.29).

Students and their families in Vietnam view higher education somewhat similarly but also differently compared to the government. From their viewpoint, studying in colleges and universities is perceived as an investment for students' future with a good and high-income career (Tran, 2010c).

Although the mission of preparing and training college students for the employment market and country's socio-economic development is deemed as an essential mission of higher education system in Vietnam, it does not seem to be executed or performed successfully. The gap between postsecondary education and industry has noticeably widened since the implementation of the economic reform policy (known as *Doi Moi*) in 1986 (Tran, 2012). Even though the employees demanded by the industry outnumber the supply of graduates from postsecondary institutions, many students graduated from colleges and universities have faced problems in attaining jobs (Tran, 2012, 2013). At the same time, employers in Vietnam continuously complained and reported their difficulties in finding workers with appropriate knowledge and skills (Pham, 2008; Tran, 2010b, Tran, 2012, 2013). The mismatch between education and employer expectations reflects the stagnation of the higher education system in Vietnam compared to the development of the country's internal economy as well as the weak linkage between these two (Tran, 2012).

The higher education system in Vietnam was first built based on the old Soviet system; therefore, it was first designed to provide technically skilled workers and match the demands of the central command economy (George, 2010). Between the 1980s and early 1990s, workers were obligated to listen and obey, to follow orders, rather than taking initiative and being

creative (Nguyen, 2009). However, things started to change and problems started to arise after the adaption of *Doi Moi.* Since the end of 1986, when Vietnam decided to transform its centrally planned economy to a market-based economy, many new sectors have been established and developed, including corporate sector, private sector, joint-venture, and foreign direct investment (FDI) enterprises (Pham & Fry, 2004; Nguyen, 2006). The higher education system has expanded rapidly and remarkably as well. In addition to only public institutions in the past, many new private and international colleges and universities have gradually been established, from 0 schools in 1987 to 88 non-public postsecondary institutions existed in 2015 (GSOV, 2010). The number of students enrolling in higher education has also grown tremendously. From 1987 to 2015, there was an increase of almost 2 million students who attended colleges and universities (GSOV, 2010). This demonstrates that Vietnam has transitioned from an "elite" to "mass" higher education system after the 1986 economic liberalization.

Although more institutions were established and more students attended colleges and universities, the postsecondary education system in Vietnam has been struggling to develop to keep up with the needs of the new economy (Tran, 2012, 2013). With the massive development of both FDI and private sector in the market-oriented economy, employers began to demand and expect their employees to have good communication skills, interpersonal skills, and teamwork skills rather than know how to follow orders and be obedient in the central planned economy (Tran, 2006; Pham, 2008; Tran & Swierczek, 2009). Yet, Vietnam's higher education system seemed unable to adapt to the changes in the workforce or satisfy the new requirements of the employers. The teaching in colleges and universities has still been heavily influenced by the traditional teaching method, which strongly reflects both the old Soviet top-down approach and Confucian culture, where teachers are often considered to be the main source of knowledge

(Tran, 2012, 2013). Students are only taught to know how to listen to the teachers, receive knowledge from the teacher, and then apply the knowledge they learned to pass the exams. They are not often trained to be creative, be independent, or be a team player in school. This created a gap between college graduate abilities and employer needs, and the gap may continue to expand if Vietnam does not incorporate more social skills practices or training programs into the school curriculum to help students develop and improve these types of skills required by the contemporary industry.

Lack of Social Skills and Unemployment in Vietnam

In 1998, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training confirmed in its report *The Summary and Evaluation on the Ten-Year* (1986-1996) (Truong et al., 2018) that higher education institutions and industry have a weak relationship. Many college graduates are not sufficiently equipped with the appropriate and essential social skills demanded in the contemporary industry. While technical skills are needed to perform required tasks effectively, social skills play an important role in achieving workplace success. In this constantly changing work environment, employers increasingly perceive social skills as an important factor in determining individual performance and leading to organizational success. Therefore, lacking social skills can negatively affect college graduates' employability.

Yet, approximately 83% of higher degree students in Vietnam are deficient in social skills area, as estimated by the IRED Institute of Education (Truong & Laura, 2015). Hence, although thousands of students graduate from colleges and universities each year, many of them experienced difficulties in finding and attaining jobs (Tran, 2013). In 2008, the unemployment rate in Vietnam was 50 percent, but the number quickly escalated to 64% in 2011, despite the fact that employment opportunities were greater in 2011 (Giao Duc Vietnam, 2012). In addition,

among those who were actually employed, 50% had to be retrained at work because of their poor performance due to lacking social skills, according to a study conducted by Ho Chi Minh University of Pedagogy in 2010 surveying 234 employers and 3,364 college graduates in Vietnam (One Vietnam, 2010).

In recent years, employers have relentlessly complained about college graduates having impractical professional knowledge and missing social skills that are required to perform efficiently and productively in the workplace, which was reported by numerous scholars (Pham, 2008; Tran & Swierczek, 2009; Tran, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015; Truong & Ronald, 2015; Truong, Ronald, & Shaw, 2018). Social skills limitation, according to employers, is considered as one of the biggest barriers preventing college graduates from being employed. Fortunately, Vietnam's higher education system has gradually become aware of this problem, and some movements have been made to address the need for social skills development in the country (Nguyen, 2009). In 2008, Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training have issued stipulations and instructions that colleges and universities have to "take responsibility to equip students with social skills before graduation" (MOET, 2008, p.1). Nevertheless, not a lot of actions have actually been taken since that stipulation. Social skills development courses seem to have not been widely developed and implemented in Vietnamese postsecondary institutions, asserted by Truong and Ronald (2015).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research design is the approach used in research when the validity of existed theories is tested in order to analyze the relationships between variables (Creswell, 1998). Utilizing this methodology allows the researchers to be able to gather numerical data for an in-depth analysis in order to explain a particular phenomenon. Therefore, the present study employed a quantitative research method to examine and compare the perceptions of Vietnamese graduates and employers on college graduates 'social skills performance to identify if there is a perception gap between how Vietnamese graduates rate their own social skills performance compared to how employers assess the graduates 'social skills in the workplace. The current research also sought to investigate whether there are any differences in the perceptions of social skills among graduates on multiple assigned variables on one hand as well as whether there are any differences in perceptions among employers on a different set of assigned variables on the other hand. This chapter is divided into five main sections: Participants, instrumentations, research variables, procedures, and data analysis. Each of these sections contains a detailed explanation.

Given the above objectives of the current study, three following research questions were developed to be used as a guide for this study:

- *Research Question 1:* Do the employers' perceptions on newly hired graduates' social skills performance differ from the perceptions of those newly hired graduates on their own social skills performance?
- *Research Question 2:* What factors, including gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education, predict the employers' perceptions on newly hired graduates' social skills performance?
- *Research Question 3:* What factors, including gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions they graduated from predict the newly hired graduates' perceptions on their own social skills performance?

Participants

Although the present study aimed to analyze Vietnamese graduates 'and employers ' perceptions on graduates 'social skills performance, this research did not target the entire college graduate population in Vietnam. Instead, it only focused on a specific graduate group, including those who have recently graduated from a Vietnamese college or university, have obtained a job, and have worked in the industry, all within one year. This group of students was identified as the "newly hired graduates" (NHGs) throughout the study. Aside from the NHGs, Vietnamese employers from different companies and industries who have interviewed, hired and worked with those "newly hired graduates" were another targeted population of this study. Furthermore, all the selected participants were currently working and living in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

To ascertain the number of survey participants needed for producing qualified results in the current research, power analysis was employed and performed using SPSS SamplePower Software. This type of program allows and assist the users to identify not only type I (α) and type II (β), but also the proposed effect size. The rate of the accepted type II error is below 0.2, which corresponding to a power of 0.8. In 1992, Cohen identified that a standard small effect size is 0.2, followed by a 0.5 and 0.8 as a standard medium and large effect size, respectively. For the current study, the proposed effect size was chosen to be at a medium level (d = 0.5). This medium effect size was considered based on the findings of Gutman and Schoon in 2013, which indicated that social skills have a medium effect to other outcomes and variables (Gutman & Schoon, 2013). Based on this information, the current study utilized the SamplePower software to calculate the appropriate number of participants for this research. The power analysis performed using the alpha (α) level of 0.05 to achieve a power of 0.8 generated a result of 72. This means that the number of participants needed for this research (either supervisors or newly

hired graduates) is at least 72.

Instrumentation

In order to be able to examine most of the social skills perceived by the employers as being important for workplace success in Vietnam, this research utilized the survey created in Kantrowitz's soft skills measurement study (2005) to explore and compare the employers 'and Vietnamese NHGs 'perspectives on the NHGs 'social skills performance at work. The soft skills performance (SSPM) questionnaire was built by Kantrowitz in her study (2005) to evaluate students and their supervisors perceptions on how students develop and perform their social skills in the workplace. This questionnaire consists of 106 statements that were categorized into seven social skills groups, and each cluster contains from 6 to 22 items:

1. Communication/persuasion skills: this group takes into the account of any means that include communicating with others, delivering presentations, negotiations, showing creativity, trying new ideas with others, asking questions, getting help from others, influencing others by being persuasive, etc....

2. Performance management skills: this group comprises the activities of managing and directing coworkers' performances and tasks on the job, for instance coaching or training others in their work, evaluating others' job performance and so on.

3. Self-management skills: this social skills group encompasses a person's manners in performing tasks, such as acting calm during a crisis, taking initiative when something needs to be done, tolerating stress, control emotion and so on.

4. Interpersonal skills: this category focuses on individuals' behaviors when interacting with others during work, including cooperating with others, showing empathy, networking, being respectful and so on.

5. Leadership/Organizational skills: this group involves how a person envisions the implementation and development of setting goals, strategies and plans and the way he/she provide solutions, for instance starting a project or a task by first identifying and defining the objectives, delegating works to others, setting goals, planning out what needs to be done and so on.

6. Political/Cultural skills: this social skills group comprises the demonstration of how a person operate and act in the organizational climate and culture, such as accepting

feedback from others, showing sensitivity to organizational cultures, understanding his/her political work environment and so on.

7. Counterproductive skills: this last category includes all the behaviors that have negative impact a persons' work performance, for example making inappropriate comments, talking without thinking, undermining others' abilities and so on.

There are two separate versions of the SSPM survey. On the self-rated version, students were asked to rate how well their own performance on each behavior meets the performance expectations laid out by their supervisor and organization as well as how well they perform each behavior compared to other working students (Kantrowitz, 2005). As for the supervisor version, the survey asked the supervisors to rate the performances of their students based on the two similar scales used in the self-rated version (Kantrowitz, 2005). These two versions were employed in this study to collect data from both the employers and Vietnamese NHGs. However, instead of asking the respondents to rate all 106 items for seven skills groups in Kantrowitz's questionnaire, the current study chose to only focus on four social skills categories, which included 67 statements in Kantrowits 'social skills performance measurement (SSPM).

According to Table 2.3 and Table 2.4, four out of seven social skills that were listed in Kantrowits 'SSPM survey seem to be ranked high in importance and essential in employers 'view when it comes to workplace success. These four skills are communication/persuasion skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills and leadership/organization skills. Therefore, to be in alignment with Table 2.3 and Table 2.4, four clustered social skills groups mentioned above were selected to be implemented for this study and the remaining three were omitted. Furthermore, when conducting the survey, the researcher has grouped these 67 items within the four chosen categories and renumbered accordingly to emphasize each social skill behavior, instead of listing them in a random order as how Kantrowitz originally did in her study. These 67 statements taken from Kantrowitz's SSPM study were kept the same and were maintained within

their original categories. The final list of survey items is illustrated in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Kantrowitz's (2005) Adapted SSPM Survey Items

Communication/Persuasion Skills
1. Show creativity and try new ideas.
2. Tend not to ask questions or get help from others.
3. Delivers effective presentations.
4. Gets buy-in/commitment from other people for projects.
5. Tend to not be influential when dealing with others.
6. Delivers effective presentations.
7. Delivers effective presentations.
8. Gets buy-in/commitment from other people for projects.
9. Tend to not be influential when dealing with others.
10. Negotiate contracts and projects.
11. Ineffective in persuading others.
12. Seek information to help do work more effectively.
13. Show enthusiasm for job.
14. Take rejection when out of options for solving a problem.
15. Update skills by learning what's new in the field.
16. Voice opinions when collaborating with others.
17. Use humor to make a point.
Self-Management Skills
1. Acts aggressively and assertively when necessary.
2. Get easily agitated during a crisis.
3. Control emotions.
4. Find it difficult to overcome anger and frustration when facing a setback.
5. Present self with proper authority.
6. Often rethink decision and change mind after a decision has been made.
7. Lack an entrepreneurial spirit.
8. Lack confidence in work and abilities.
9. Solve problems quickly and effectively.
10. Take initiative to do it if something needs to be done.
11. Take risks in work to "push the envelope."
12. Don't tolerates stress very well.

(table continues)

Interpersonal Skills
1. Act courteously and respectfully toward others.
2. Act patiently in a variety of situations.
3. Admit mistakes when things go wrong.
4. Actively build a "network" to have a group of people who serve as professional contacts.
5. Seek to build and maintain professional relationships.
6. When responding to others, compliment them on valid points.
7. Have a hard time compromising when necessary.
8. Cooperate with others to get the job done.
9. If something needs to be addressed, confront an issue head-on to defuse the situation.
10. Demonstrate empathy when dealing with others.
11. Effectively develop rapport when meeting someone new.
12. Find it difficult to get dissimilar people to work together.
13. Greet employees and coworkers.
14. Open to hearing other points of view.
15. Listen to concerns that other people have.
16. Promote a team environment.
17. Reconcile different opinions.

In the current research survey, the examiner also added some demographic/work background questions for investigating and analysis purposes. The self-rated version had four more demographic questions, including the NHG's gender identification, major, level of education, and type of education institution they graduate from. Four more questions were also added to the supervisor version regarding the employers 'demographic/work background information, involving the employers 'gender identification, size of the company, type of the industry, and level of education. Finally, the respondents rated the 67-item on the extent to which they agree with each statement using a separate point scale for each version. The self-rate version has six-point scale from "no basis for judgment" (N/A) to "much better than others" (5), and the supervisor version also has six-point scale from "no basis for judgment" (N/A) to "greatly exceeds standard" (5). The time to complete the survey was between 25 to 30 minutes.

However, for the question about the type of the industry in the supervisor version, only

six specific industry categories were chosen for selection: Automobile, business, digital marketing, healthcare, hotel and restaurant management, information technology. These six industries are the ones currently with the most in-demand professions and highest-paying occupations in Vietnam, according to numerous sources (Anh Huy, 2020; Chieu Anh, 2020; Dong A University, 2020; FPT University, 2020; Gia Dinh University, 2020; VNUK, 2020). They were also the most repeated industries to be identified as one of the most desirable jobs in Vietnam in those articles. Therefore, this study wanted to focus on examine whether the supervisors in these six high-demand industries have different perspectives in the social skills performance of the newly hired graduates in Vietnam.

Instrument Translation Process

Since the original version of the selected survey was created in the English language but the participants of the current study were Vietnamese students and employers, a translation process needed to be conducted. This process involved both forward and backward translation, which were performed by two different highly qualified university professors in Vietnam who are fluent in speaking, writing, and reading in both English and Vietnamese. The forward translation process from English to Vietnamese was performed by Dr. Anh Nguyen. She is a Vietnamese citizen, and her primary language is Vietnamese. Dr. Anh Nguyen got her Doctoral Degree in Bulacan Public University, Philippines and completed her education in English. She has a TOEIC Score of 925/990. She is also a faculty member at HCMC University of Transportation as well as a department chair at Bach Viet College in Vietnam for over 10 years.

After that, the translation process from Vietnamese back to English was conducted by Dr. Cau Nguyen. He is also a Vietnamese citizen with Vietnamese as primary language. He earned both bachelor's and master's degree from University of Houston Clear Lake and Ph.D. from

Texas A&M International University in the United States. He is currently a lecturer at three different universities in Vietnam and teaches in both English and Vietnamese. After both translation processes were done by these two professors, the researcher herself worked as a "gatekeeper" and ensured that these two translations aligned with each other. She is a native Vietnamese speaker and has over ten years living and studying in the United States.

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

Reliability and validity of the measurements are vital. According to Phelan and Wren (206), validity is imperative because it is used to verify and validate whether the assessment tools of the study is measuring what it is supposed to measure. A reliable measurement instrument helps to attain stable and consistent outcomes. The internal consistency reliability evaluates the homogeneity degree of the assessment items within each instrument or scale and shows the extent to which each instrument or scale is measuring a unified construct (Salkind, 2010). If such measures are identified to obtain inadequate reliability, which means the internal consistence reliability of the assessment tool is less than 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), then the outcomes of that study should be interpreted carefully. In the development of Kantrowitz's (2005) SSPM measurement tool, she clustered all social skills items into seven groups. Kantrowitz has tested and validated her assessment survey that was used to measure students 'social skills development from both students 'and supervisors 'perspectives with reliability (Cronbach α) demonstrated at above 0.70 (Kantrowitz, 2005).

Research Variables

Dependent variable, according to Gay (1996) is the "change or difference in a behavior or characteristic that occurs as a result" (p.10) of the independent variable. It is also used as the standard against which groups are being compared (Lewis, 2001). For the current study, the

research question (RQ) number 1 contained one independent variable with two different groups: employers and newly hired graduates in Vietnam. The dependent variables for the RQ1, on the other hand, were the four skills groups that included 67 items selected from the original Kantrowitz's SSPM survey. These skills groups also acted as the dependent variables for RQ2 and RQ3. However, the independent variables of these two research questions were different than those of the research question number 1. Gender, size of company, type of industry, major, level of education, and type of educational institution students graduated from were all identified as the independent variables with different categorical groups for both RQ2 and RQ3.

The "gender" variable was recorded as either male or female, whereas the "size of company" was measured in five different levels: fewer than 5 full-time employees, 5-50 employees (small firm), 50-500 employees (medium-sized firm), and more than 500 employees (large firm). The current study has operationalized "type of industry" in term of six different categories: Automobile, business, hotel and restaurant management, digital marketing, healthcare, and information technology. "Major" variable was observed and measured on the basis of five academic disciplines: applied arts, economics, health, technology, and tourism marketing and humanity. Furthermore, "level of education" was recorded as either associate degree or bachelor's degree. Finally, for "the type of educational institution students graduated from," this variable was measured and categorized into four different groups: specialized junior college, multi-disciplined junior college, specialized university, and multi-discipline university.

There have been numerous research conducted on how employers assess college graduates 'social skills performance or how those graduates evaluate their own social skill performance (Steward et al., 2016; Truong et al., 2018). Yet, very limited studies have been done on what factors associate with those ratings between employers and college graduates. In

literature, gender has been found to have a relationship with the level of social skills performance but not with the perceptions of individuals on college graduates 'social skills performance (Hong, 2016). Hence, gender became the first variable being selected for this research analysis on how it relates to employers/college graduates' perspectives on graduates 'social skills performance. The second predictor variable being chosen for analysis was level of education. The higher number of years of education an employer or a student has, the more social skills training he/she receive, which might impact how these two individuals measure the social skills performance of recently college graduates in the workplace.

Major, type of industry, and size of company were the next three variables being selected for examination on whether they have a correlation with the ratings of college graduates 'social skills performance. Students studying in different majors would acquire or receive a different set of social skills. They also have distinctive viewpoints on which social skills are important in obtaining employment as well as in achieving career success. Employers working in different industries or in different company sizes would require their employees to have a different social skill set in order to succeed in the workplace. Because of these dissimilar mindsets and standpoints, these two variables might have an influence on how employers or graduates evaluate the social skills performance of those college graduates.

Finally, students who attend specialized colleges or universities can only interact with students who are in the same discipline with them compared to those who enroll in multi-disciplinary colleges or universities have more opportunities to meet people from various majors and fields of study. Consequently, students graduated from a specialized college/university might acquire different social skill set than those completed their study at a multi-disciplinary college/university, which in turn might affect how the NHGs group evaluate their own social

skills performance. Because of this, variable known as the type of institutions students graduated from were chosen for the current research analysis.

Procedures

Before administering the survey, schools and companies that had prospective participants for the current research were identified for recruitment. After finalizing and shortening the list of all the potential institutions and enterprises, ten junior colleges and ten universities as well as twenty different companies and firms were selected to be contacted for participant recruitment. Junior colleges and universities were chosen based on their disciplinary attribute, whether they are specialized or multi-disciplinary higher education institution. Companies and firms were selected depending on their business size classification, from having fewer than 5 full-time employees to more than 500 employees. However, only 5 universities and 8 colleges agreed to partake in this research study. Admissions advisors and career advisors at those 13 participated colleges and universities were then asked to distribute emails with a link to the online survey for all graduates who have recently gained employment (i.e., within a year).

As for the employers/supervisors 'participant recruitment, 18 out of 20 businesses responded affirmatively and participated in the study after being contacted. A list of all the managers and supervisors with personal information, including names, positions, and email addresses, who have hired or worked with college graduates, was then collected from each company. A total number of 152 emails that included a link to the online survey were sent out to the listed supervisors and managers from the 18 participating firms. Another reminder email was sent out to all those contacts after 2 weeks from the first email. Both versions of the survey sent out to graduated students and supervisors used Qualtrics, and the Qualtrics surveys were distributed online to the graduated students 'email addresses by the schools' admission/ career

advisors from each institution and to supervisors/managers' email addresses. The surveys, both self-rated and supervisor versions, contained an informed consent notice for the participant to complete before they could proceed with the survey. Taking part in the survey was entirely voluntary and no compensation was being rewarded for participation.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through the Qualtrics survey that was developed from Kantrowitz's (2005) SSPM study and was modified to fit the purposes of this research. Results of those surveys were recorded and transferred to the Statistical Program for the Social Science (SPSS) software for analysis. To answer the three research questions addressed in the current study, data collected from the self-rated version and the supervisor version of the survey were added and calculated separately to produce a mean score for each skill group. After that, an independent sample *t*-test was utilized to examine whether the means in social skills performance scores of employers group and NHGs group are statistically different from each other.

Additionally, ordinary least square (OLS) regression method was used to predict which factor, including gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education affects the employers 'perceptions on NHGs 'social skills performance during job. The same statistical method was employed to forecast which one of these determinants, including gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institution from which they graduated, influenced the NHGs' perceptions on how they rated their own social skills performance at work. All the predictive factors in RQ2 were categorical variables, including gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education. For analysis purposes, the reference category chosen for those predictor variables in RQ2 were female, bachelor's degree, more than 500 employees (large firm) and information technology.

However, in RQ3, only three demographic background questions were answered in a categorical way, including gender, level of education, and type of educational institutions. The question about NHG's major was a short answer instead of being listed as a multiple-choice question for participants to choose from. Hence, before transferring the data into SPSS for analysis, results from this question were grouped together and converted into a categorical variable. According to Pham (1995), Vietnam has five main academic disciplines in college level: health, economics, technology, applied arts, tourism marketing and humanity. Responses of the "major" question generated from the self-rated survey version were clustered into these five main academic disciplines for statistical analysis purposes, which is shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Academic Disciplines with Corresponding Majors

Discipline	Majors	
Applied Arts	• Graphic Design	• Interior Design
Economics	• Accounting • Audit • Banking and Finance • Business • Business Law • Economic Law	• Human Resources Management • Industrial Management • International Business • Law • Management • Marketing
Health	• Dental • Medicine • Nursing	• Nutrition • Pharmaceutical industry • Public Health
Technology	• Automobile • Computer Science • Food Technology	• Information Technology • Medical Imaging Techniques
Tourism Marketing and Humanity	• Chinese • Community Services • English • Hotel Management	• Japanese • Public Relations • Restaurant and Food Service Management • Sociology

After the collected data from the background question regarding NHGs 'major in the self-rated survey version was grouped together into five main academic disciplines, all predictive

factors in RQ3 (gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions students graduated from) were classified as categorical variables. Every statistical software procedure (including SPSS) that involves dummy coding predictor variables always uses a reference category. Therefore, in order to interpret and analyze the results accurately and usefully for both RQ2 and RQ3, the reference categories of all the predictor variables in RQ3 were chosen to be similar with those reference categories in RQ2. They were female, bachelor's degree, technology, and multi-disciplinary university.

Moreover, because all the independent variables in RQ3 were identified as categorical variables, whereas the mean scores generated from the survey results for each skill group were continuous variables, ranging from number 1 to 5, OLS regression model was chosen to answer RQ2 and RQ3 in the current. This type of regression analysis is commonly used to identify the strength of the associations between continuous response (dependent) variables and categorical or continuous explanatory (independent) variables (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999. Table 3.3 summarizes the independent and dependent variables for the OLS regression.

Table 3.3

Independent and Dependent Variables for OLS Regression Analysis

Independent (Predictive) Variables		Dependent Variables
Supervisors	• Gender • Size of Company • Type of Industry • Level of Education	• Communication Skills • Interpersonal Skills • Self-Management Skills • Leadership/Organization Skills
NHGs	• Gender • Academic Discipline • Level of Education • Type of Educational Institutions NHGs graduated from	

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The main objective of this study was to examine: (a) the difference between employers ' and newly hired graduates 'perceptions on those graduates 'social skills performance in Vietnam, and (b) what factors, including gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education, would influence the employers 'perspectives on college graduates 'social skills performance, as well as (c) what factors, including gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions students graduate from, would predict college graduates 'perspectives on their own social skills performance. The data of this research were collected through Qualtrics delivered surveys. Demographic/work background information of both supervisors and newly hired graduates participating in the study was also accumulated to (1) describe the sample and to (2) analyze which of those factors affect either the employers 'or the college graduates 'perceptions on graduates 'social skills performance. Results generated from the surveys were then analyzed using the SPSS program with independent sample t-test and ordinary least square regression to test the main hypotheses and answer the three research questions.

Research Questions

The three underlying research questions for the present study are as follows:

1. Do the employers' perceptions on NHGs' social skills performance differ from the perceptions of those NHGs on their own social skills performance?
2. What factors, including gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education, predict the employers' perceptions on NHG's social skills performance?
3. What factors, including gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions they graduated from predict the NHGs' perceptions on their own social skills performance?

These questions, after rewording, were translated into the following three hypotheses:

1. The employers' perceptions on NHGs' social skills performance are significantly different from the perceptions of those NHGs on their own social skills performance.
2. The following factors, including gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education, all influence the employers' perceptions on NHG's social skills performance.
3. The following factors, including gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions they graduated from, all influence the NHGs' perceptions on their own social skills performance.

Descriptive Analysis of Demographics

Out of all the graduated students invited to participate in this study from thirteen colleges and universities in Vietnam, a total number of 213 graduates (N = 213) out of 484 (N = 484) responded and filled out the survey. As for the employer participants, 107 *(*N = 107) out of 152 (N = 152) invited via email agreed to take part in the research and completed the survey. The participation and completion rate (70.39%) for employer participants were considered high to the average participation response rate (24%) (Sheehan, 2001). However, although the participation and completion rate for the NHGs group (44%) was a lot lower compared to the employers group, this response rate was still higher than the researcher's expectation as well as widespread standards for survey response rate (24%) (Sheehan, 2001).

From the data collected for the self-rated version survey, most of the respondents (70%) were female. The number of participants who either had an associate degree or a bachelor's degree was split almost evenly with 54% reported to have associate degree and 46% with bachelor's degree. Moreover, the type of institution that had the highest number of graduates who participated in this study was specialized junior college, which yielded 47%. All the survey participants graduated from five main major sectors collectively: Health, business and economic, technology, applied arts, and tourism marketing and humanity. About one-thirds of respondents (35%) graduated with a health degree, whereas only 1% reported to hold a degree in applied arts.

Table 4.1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for participants in the self-rated version survey.

Table 4.1

*Descriptive Statistics for NHG Survey Participants (*N = *213)*

Characteristic		n	%
Gender	Male	64	30
	Female	149	70
Degree	Associate degree	115	54
	Bachelor's degree	98	46
Type of Institution	Specialized junior college	101	47
	Multi-disciplinary junior college	6	3
	Specialized university	54	25
	Multi-disciplinary university	52	24
Major	Health sector	75	35
	Business and economic sector	62	29
	Technology sector	35	16
	Applied arts sector	2	1
	Tourism marketing and humanity sector	39	18

One hundred seven supervisors from eighteen companies and businesses responded anonymously to the survey. Almost two-thirds - 63% - of the survey respondents were male. As for the educational status of those participants, 52% of them had an associate degree and 48% graduated with a bachelor's degree. When recruiting potential supervisor participants for the survey, four different sizes of companies or businesses were selected: Fewer than 5 full-time employees, 5-50 employees, 51-500 employees, and more than 500 employees. Employers working in different business size classification (related to the employee number in the company) would require their employees to have different social skill set in order to succeed in the workplace. For instance, employers currently work in a large size company with more than 500 employees might not consider leadership skills as important for career success as those who work in a firm with only 5 to 50 full-time employees. Thus, employers coming from different

company sizes, ranging from smallest to largest, might have different perceptions in which social skills are essential for workplace success, which in turn impact how they assess the level of social skills performance in newly hired graduates.

According to descriptive statistics, supervisors from those small firms that have 5-50 employees had the highest number of participants in the survey, which accounted for 75%. Furthermore, 23% of respondents reported to work in the automobile industry, 21% in information technology, 19% in healthcare field, 15% in hotel and restaurant management, 13% in business, and 8% in digital marketing. When comparing to the sample NHGs group, most of the employers who completed the survey were female, whereas the majority of graduates who responded to the survey were male. Yet, both groups have similar proportion of participants with associate degree. Table 4.2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for respondents of the supervisor version survey.

Table 4.2

*Descriptive Statistics for Employer/Supervisor Survey Respondents (*N = *107)*

Characteristic		n	%
Gender	Male	67	63
	Female	40	37
Degree	Associate degree	56	52
	Bachelor's degree	51	48
Size of Company	Fewer than 5 full-time employees	9	8
	5-50 employees (small firm)	80	75
	51-500 employees (medium-sized firm)	17	16
	More than 500 employees (large firm)	1	1
Type of Industry	Automobile	25	23
	Business	14	13
	Digital marketing	9	8
	Healthcare	20	19
	Hotel and restaurant management	16	15
	Information technology	23	21

Table 4.3 presents descriptive statistics on the social skills performance of the comparison group by each social skill, including communication skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership/organization skills. According to this table, social skills performances of newly hired graduates were rated at a nominally higher score when self-reported than when they were assessed by the supervisors in all four different social skills.

Table 4.3

Social Skills Performances: Comparison across Groups on each Social Skill

Social Skills	Group	n	M	SD	SE
Communication Skills	Supervisors	107	3.00	0.34	0.03
	NHGs	213	3.07	0.55	0.04
Self-Management Skills	Supervisors	107	2.99	0.41	0.04
	NHGs	213	3.04	0.56	0.04
Interpersonal Skills	Supervisors	107	3.05	0.36	0.04
	NHGs	213	3.19	0.55	0.04
Leadership/Organization Skills	Supervisors	107	3.01	0.31	0.03
	NHGs	213	3.09	0.54	0.04

Results

Research Question 1

The first research question for the current study was: "Do the employers 'perceptions on NHGs 'social skills performance differ from the perceptions of those NHGs on their own social skills performance?" To answer this question, an independent samples t-test was employed. Based on the output generated from this analysis method, the Levene's test for equality of error variances for all four social skills (communication skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership/organization skills) was significant with the p-value at less than 0.05 (see Table 4.4). The significance of the Levene's test for equality of error variances indicated that the

homogeneity of variance could not be assumed. Hence, the data were run on the condition of equal variances not assumed as well as 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the mean difference.

The results of the independent sample *t*-test analysis showed that both the perceptions of employers and NHGs on the NHGs 'performance of communication skills, self-management skills, and leadership/organization skills were not significantly different from each other. Although the mean scores from the NHGs group for the performance of those three social skills were higher than the mean scores from the supervisors group (according to table 10 above), the p-value generated from the independent sample *t*-test analysis indicated that this apparent differences shown in table 10 between comparing groups were just statistical "noise." They were not considered as statistically significant differences. However, when both groups assessing NHGs 'interpersonal skills, the employers 'perceptions were statistically significantly different from the NHGs 'perceptions on the NHGs 'performance of this type of social skills. The NHGs rated themselves at a significantly higher score (3.19 ±0.55) compared to when they were being rated by the employers/supervisors (3.05 ±0.36) ($t(296) = -2.611$, $p < 0.05$) on the NHGs ' interpersonal skills performance with a mean difference of 0.14 (95% CI, -0.236 to -0.033) (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4).

Research Question 2

The second research question was designed to examine what demographic/work background factors of the supervisors group predict their perceptions on the social skills performance of newly hired graduates in Vietnam. The analysis tool utilized to evaluate the data and answer this research question was ordinary least square regression, using SPSS. The regression was run with controls for gender, size of company, type of industry, and level of education.

Table 4.4

Independent Sample t-*Test Analysis Summary*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-Test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Communication Skills	Equal variances assumed	21.284	0.000	-1.236	318	0.217	-0.072	0.058	-0.187	0.043
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.433	304	0.153	-0.072	0.050	-0.171	0.027
Self-Management Skills	Equal variances assumed	7.010	0.009	-0.684	318	0.495	-0.041	0.061	-0.160	0.078
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.757	277	0.450	-0.041	0.055	-0.149	0.066
Interpersonal Skills	Equal variances assumed	16.651	0.000	-2.287	318	0.023	-0.135	0.059	-0.250	-0.019
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.611	296	0.009	-0.135	0.052	-0.236	-0.033
Leadership/ Organization Skills	Equal variances assumed	21.580	0.000	-1.456	318	0.146	-0.082	0.056	-0.192	0.029
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.715	311	0.087	-0.082	0.048	-0.175	0.012

This statistical analysis was performed four times for each different social skill to test the relationship between those predicting variables and the rating of NHGs 'social skills performance, including commutation skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership/organization skills.

Communication Skills

There was no significant association between supervisors 'gender, level of education, and size of company and the evaluation of NHGs 'communication skills performance. Each variable of the three predicting factors (gender, level of education, and size of company) had a p-value greater than 0.05. However, the regression analysis found that the type of industry the supervisors participants currently work in, including automobile ($p < 0.001$), business ($p < 0.001$), digital marketing ($p < 0.05$), healthcare ($p < 0.05$), and hotel and restaurant management ($p < 0.05$), were all significant predictors of NHGs 'communication skills performance.

According to the regression output presented in table 12 below, the three industry types, including automobile, digital marketing, and healthcare, had a negative relationship with their chosen reference group, information technology industry, on the ratings of graduates 'social skills performance. On the other hand, business and hotel and restaurant management were positively correlated with technology industry on graduates 'social skills performance scores. Hotel and restaurant management was the strongest predictive factor with a standardized coefficient of 0.533, followed by business ($\beta \approx 0.504$), automobile ($\beta \approx -0.296$), healthcare ($\beta \approx -0.199$), and digital marketing ($\beta \approx -0.151$). These figures indicated that supervisors who work in hotel and restaurant management industry rated graduates about 0.533 points higher on communication skills than do supervisors in the information technology industry. The same goes for business industry. As for the remaining three industries, employers in the automobile,

healthcare, and digital marketing all assessed the social skills performance of graduates about 0.296, 0.199, and 0.151 points lower than employers working in the information technology industry.

Overall, the results of OLS regression analysis demonstrated that the group of independent variables (gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry) presented a statistically significantly association with the dependent variable (NHGs ' communication skills performance) with $F(10, 96), = 41.018$, $p < 0.001$. The R-square value at 0.810 also indicated that 81% of the variance in the ratings of graduates 'communication skills performance could be predicted from the independent variables, including supervisors 'gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables predicting NHGs' Communication skills Performance by the Supervisors Group

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Male	-0.037	0.094	-0.024	-0.398	0.692	[-0.225, 0.150]
Associate Degree	0.058	0.074	0.038	0.789	0.432	[-0.088, 0.205]
Fewer Than 5 Full-Time Employees	0.078	0.376	0.029	0.208	0.836	[-0.669, 0.826]
5-50 Employees (Small Firm)	0.074	0.368	0.042	0.202	0.840	[-0.656, 0.804]
50-500 Employees (Medium-Sized Firm)	0.022	0.372	0.011	0.059	0.953	[-0.717, 0.761]
Automobile	-0.532	0.102	-0.296	-5.196	<0.001	[-0.735, -0.329]
Business	1.136	0.140	0.504	8.098	<0.001	[0.858, 1.415]
Digital Marketing	-0.412	0.141	-0.151	-2.921	0.004	[-0.693, -0.132]
Healthcare	-0.388	0.134	-0.199	-2.893	0.005	[-0.655, -0.122]
Hotel and Restaurant Management	1.135	0.124	0.533	9.122	<0.001	[0.888, 1.382]

Note. $R^2 = 0.810$ ($N = 107$, $p < .001$). CI = confidence interval for B. Baseline group for Company Size: More Than 500 Employees (Large-Sized Firm). Baseline group for Type of Industry: Information Technology

Self-Management Skills

Similar to communication skills, there was no significant relationship between supervisors 'demographic/work background variables (gender, level of education, and size of company) and NHGs 'self-management skills performance ratings. All three of these predictive factors had a p-value greater than 0.05. Based on the output generated from the regression analysis, only four variables of the type of industry factor were statistically significantly predicted the ratings of self-management skills performance of NHGs group: Automobile ($p < 0.001$), business ($p < 0.001$), healthcare ($p < 0.05$), and hotel and restaurant management ($p < 0.001$). With a p-value of greater than 0.05, the dummy variable of the type of industry - digital marketing – was not a significant predictor of NHGs 'self-management skills performance.

According to the generated output shown in table 13 below, automobile and healthcare industry were negatively related with their selected reference group (information technology) on the ratings of NHG's self-management skills performance, whereas business and hotel and restaurant management had a positive relationship with information technology industry on the self-management skills performance ratings of college graduates. Out of the five significant predictors of NHGs 'self-management skills performance, hotel and restaurant management was the strongest factor ($\beta \approx 0.575$), followed by business ($\beta \approx 0.483$), automobile ($\beta \approx -0.281$), and healthcare ($\beta \approx -0.176$). These figures illustrated that supervisors who work in the hotel and restaurant management as well as business gave the graduates a higher score on self-management skills performance than those who were in the information technology industry by 0.575 point and 0.483 point, respectively.

Overall, the results of OLS regression analysis displayed that the group of independent variables (gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry) statistically reliably

predicted the dependent variable (NHG's self-management skills performance) with $F(10, 96) = 36.971$, $p < 0.001$. Moreover, the regression analysis provided a R-square value of 0.794, which means that the independent variables (supervisors 'gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry) could predict approximately 79% of the variability in the outcome variable, which is the scores of NHGs 'self-management skills performance (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting NHGs' Self-Management Skills Performance by the Supervisors Group

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Male	-0.016	0.105	-0.009	-0.151	0.880	[-0.225, 0.193]
Associate Degree	0.192	0.082	0.118	2.327	0.022	[0.028, 0.356]
Fewer Than 5 Full-Time Employees	-0.211	0.420	-0.072	-0.503	0.616	[-1.045, 0.622]
5-50 Employees (Small Firm)	-0.079	0.410	-0.042	-0.194	0.847	[-0.894, 0.735]
50-500 Employees (Medium-Sized Firm)	-0.144	0.415	-0.065	-0.346	0.730	[-0.968, 0.681]
Automobile	-0.540	0.114	-0.281	-4.727	<0.001	[-0.767, -0.313]
Business	1.164	0.157	0.483	7.435	<0.001	[0.853, 1.474]
Digital Marketing	-0.185	0.157	-0.063	-1.173	0.244	[-0.497, 0.128]
Healthcare	-0.367	0.150	-0.176	-2.451	0.016	[-0.664, -0.070]
Hotel and Restaurant Management	1.310	0.139	0.575	9.439	<0.001	[1.035, 1.586]

Note. $R^2 = 0.794$ ($N = 107$, $p < .001$). CI = confidence interval for B. Baseline group for Company Size: More Than 500 Employees (Large-Sized Firm). Baseline group for Type of Industry: Information Technology.

Interpersonal Skills

According to the generated regression analysis output, there was no significant correlation between supervisors 'gender, level of education, and size of company and the scores of NHGs 'interpersonal skills performance. However, three types of the industry that the supervisors currently work in were identified as significant predictors of NHGs 'interpersonal

skills performance with a similar p-value of less than 0.001. They were automobile, business and hotel and restaurant management. This analysis also found the other two dummy variables of the industry types factor (digital marketing and healthcare) to not significantly predicted the ratings of interpersonal skills performance of the newly hired graduates group.

Based on the results, business and hotel and restaurant management industry had a positive association with their chosen reference group, information technology industry, on NHGs 'interpersonal skills performance ratings. The other industry, automobile, was negatively correlated with the information technology industry on the evaluation of NHGs 'interpersonal skills performance. Similar to communication and self-management skills, hotel and restaurant management was also the strongest predictor of NHGs 'interpersonal skills performance with a standardized coefficient of 0.592. The second strongest predictor factor was business industry ($\beta \approx 0.563$), followed by automobile ($\beta \approx -0.249$). These figures demonstrated that supervisors who work in the hotel and restaurant management and business industry rated graduates 'interpersonal skills performance higher than those in the information technology industry by 0.592 and 0.563, respectively. On the other hand, supervisors in the automobile industry evaluated the interpersonal skills performance of the NHGs group about 0.249 point lower than employers who work in the information technology industry.

Finally, the results of the regression analysis indicated that the group of independent variables (gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry) showed a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable (NHGs' interpersonal skills performance) with $F(10,96) = 34.016$, $p < 0.001$. The R-square value at 0.780 also illustrated that 78% of the variance in graduates 'interpersonal skills performance could be predicted from the independent variables (supervisors 'gender, level of education, size of company, and type of

industry) (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting NHGs' Interpersonal Skills Performance by the Supervisors Group

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Male	0.103	0.099	0.067	1.041	0.301	[-0.093, 0.298]
Associate Degree	-0.053	0.077	-0.036	-0.686	0.495	[-0.206, 0.100]
Fewer Than 5 Full-Time Employees	-0.153	0.393	-0.057	-0.388	0.699	[-0.934, 0.628]
5-50 Employees (Small Firm)	-0.105	0.384	-0.062	-0.274	0.784	[-0.868, 0.657]
50-500 Employees (Medium-Sized Firm)	-0.309	0.389	-0.153	-0.793	0.430	[-1.081, 0.464]
Automobile	-0.434	0.107	-0.249	-4.055	<0.001	[-0.646, -0.222]
Business	1.231	0.147	0.563	8.395	<0.001	[0.940, 1.522]
Digital Marketing	-0.293	0.148	-0.110	-1.985	0.050	[-0.586, 0.000]
Healthcare	-0.228	0.140	-0.121	-1.628	0.107	[-0.507, 0.050]
Hotel and Restaurant Management	1.225	0.130	0.592	9.419	<0.001	[0.967, 1.483]

Note. $R^2 = 0.780$ (N = 107, p < .001). CI = confidence interval for B. Baseline group for Company Size: More Than 500 Employees (Large-Sized Firm). Baseline group for Type of Industry: Information Technology.

Leadership/Organization Skills

Similar to the three social skills above, ordinary least square regression was employed again to examine the relationship between supervisors' demographic/work background factors and the ratings of NHGs 'leadership/organization skills performance. The results of the regression showed that gender, level of education, and size of company had no significant association with the ratings of NHGs 'leadership/organization skills performance. On the contrary, all dummy variables of industry types factor statistically significantly predicted the scores of leadership/organization skills performance of NHGs Automobile, business, healthcare, and hotel and restaurant management had similar p-value at less than 0.001, followed by digital

marketing with a p-value at less than 0.05.

Based on the regression output presented in table 15 below, business industry had a positive relationship with the chosen reference group, information technology industry, on the ratings of graduates 'leadership/organization skills performance, while the other four industries (automobile, digital marketing, healthcare, and hotel and restaurant management) had a negative association with the information technology group on the graduates 'leadership/organization skills performance scores. The industry of hotel and restaurant management was also identified as the strongest predictive factor with a standardized coefficient of 0.546, followed by business ($\beta \approx 0.483$), automobile ($\beta \approx -0.344$), healthcare ($\beta \approx -0.238$), and digital marketing ($\beta \approx -0.105$).

These figures demonstrated that supervisors working in the business industry evaluated graduates 'leadership/organization skills performance about 0.546 point higher than those in the information technology industry. On the other hand, supervisors who work in automobile, healthcare, and digital marketing rated the leadership/organization skills of NHGs group at a lower score than those in the information technology industry by 0.483, 0.344, and 0.238, respectively.

Overall, the OLS regression analysis output illustrated that the group of independent variables (gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry) statistically reliably predicted the dependent variable (NHGs 'leadership/organization skills performance) with $F(10, 96), = 50.061$, $p < 0.001$. Moreover, the regression analysis provided a R-square value of 0.839, which means that the independent variables (supervisors 'gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry) could predict approximately 84% of the variability in the outcome variable, which is the scores of NHGs 'leadership/organization skills performance (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting NHGs' Leadership/Organization Skills Performance by the Supervisors Group

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Male	-0.036	0.084	-0.023	-0.424	0.673	[-.0203, 0.132]
Associate Degree	0.050	0.066	0.034	0.751	0.454	[-0.082, 0.181]
Fewer Than 5 Full-Time Employees	0.024	0.337	0.009	0.072	0.943	[-0.644, 0.693]
5-50 Employees (Small Firm)	0.111	0.329	0.065	0.336	0.737	[-0.542, 0.764]
50-500 Employees (Medium-Sized Firm)	-0.026	0.333	-0.013	-0.077	0.939	[-0.687, 0.636]
Automobile	-0.600	0.092	-0.344	-6.548	<0.001	[-0.782, -0.418]
Business	1.058	0.126	0.483	8.429	<0.001	[0.809, 1.307]
Digital Marketing	-0.279	0.126	-0.105	-2.207	0.030	[-0.529, -0.028]
Healthcare	-0.451	0.120	-0.238	-3.759	<0.001	[-0.690, -0.213]
Hotel and Restaurant Management	1.129	0.111	0.546	10.144	<0.001	[0.908, 1.350]

Note. $R^2 = 0.839$ (N = 107, p < .001). CI = confidence interval for B. Baseline group for Company Size: More Than 500 Employees (Large-Sized Firm). Baseline group for Type of Industry: Information Technology.

Research Question 3

The purpose of the third research question was to investigate which demographic factors of the newly hired graduates, including gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions they graduated from, predict NHGs 'perceptions on their own social skills performance. The statistical tool employed to analyze the data for the third question was again the ordinary least square regression, also using SPSS. The dependent variables for the four regression models were the performance of each of the four social skills: communication skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership/organization skills. The independent variables used to predict the performance of the four social skills were gender, major, level of education, and type of educational institutions from which NHGs graduated. The generated

outputs were presented below from table 16 to table 19. Each table summarized the regression analysis for variables predicting each social skills performance of the newly hired graduates group.

Communication Skills

Ordinary least square regression was utilized to examine whether there is a relationship between NHGs 'four demographic factors and the ratings of graduates 'communication skills performance. Regression outputs presented no signification association between NHGs 'gender, level of education, and type of institutions students graduated from and how NHGs evaluated their own communication skills performance. Moreover, the results also found only one dummy variables of the major factor (tourism, marketing, and humanity sector) to be a significant predictor of NHGs 'communication skills performance scores with a p-value of less than 0.001. This variable was also positively correlated with its chosen reference group, which is the technology sector ($\beta \approx 0.310$). Newly hired graduates who got a degree in tourism, marketing and humanity sector rated themselves at about 0.310 point higher than those who graduated with a degree in technology sector.

Overall, the results of OLS regression analysis indicated that the group of independent variables (NHGs 'gender, level of education, major, and type of institutions students graduated from) had significant association with the dependent variable (ratings of NHGs 'communication skills performance) with $F(9, 203) = 3.151$, $p < 0.05$. R-square value of 0.123 was also produced from this regression analysis, which illustrated that the independent variables of NHGs group (gender, level of education, major, and type of institutions) could predict about 12% of the variability in the dependent variable (ratings of NHGs 'communication skills performance) (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting NHGs' Communication Skills Performance by the NHGs Group

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Male	-0.092	0.143	-.0.046	-0.646	0.519	[-0.373, 0.189]
Health Sector	0.044	0.203	0.023	0.215	0.830	[-0.356, 0.444]
Business and Economic Sector	0.194	0.206	0.096	0.942	0.348	-0.212, -0.601]
Tourism Marketing and Humanity Sector	0.740	0.219	0.310	3.377	<0.001	[0.308, -1.171]
Applied Arts Sector	-0.863	0.674	-0.090	-1.279	0.202	[-2.193, -0.467]
Associate Degree	0.230	0.310	0.124	0.742	0.459	[-0.381, 0.840]
Specialized Junior College	-0.019	0.315	-0.010	-0.059	0.953	[-0.640, 0.603]
Multi-Disciplinary Junior College	0.037	0.445	0.007	0.083	0.934	[-0.839, 0.914]
Specialized University	-0.011	0.242	-0.005	-0.045	0.964	[-0.489, 0.467]

Note. $R^2 = 0.123$ (N = 213, p < .001). CI = confidence interval for B. Baseline group for Major: Technology Sector. Baseline group for Type of Institutions: Multi-Disciplinary University.

Self-Management Skills

The regression analysis found no significant association between NHGs 'gender, level of education, and type of institutions and their own assessment on their self-management skills performance. Only one dummy variable (tourism, marketing, and humanity sector) of the major factor was identified as a significant predictor of NHGs' self-management skills performance scores at a p-value of less than 0.001. This variable also had a positive relationship with its selected reference group (technology sector) ($\beta \approx 0.380$). Newly hired graduates who obtained a degree in tourism, marketing and humanity sector evaluated their self-management skills performance higher than those received a degree in technology sector by about 0.380 point.

Finally, the OLS regression outputs demonstrated that the group of independent variables

(NHGs' gender, level of education, major, and type of institutions students graduated from) statistically reliably predicted the dependent variable (ratings of NHGs' self-management skills performance) with $F(0,203) = 3.537$, $p < 0.001$. The R-square value at 0.136 also indicated that about 14% of the variance in the ratings of graduates' self-management skills performance could be predicted from the variables NHGs' gender, level of education, major, and type of institutions students graduated from (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting NHGs' Self-Management Skills Performance by the NHGs Group

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Male	-0.036	0.143	-0.018	-0.249	0.803	[-0.317, 0.246]
Health Sector	-0.027	0.203	-0.014	-0.131	0.896	[-0.427, -0.374]
Business and Economic Sector	0.302	0.207	0.147	1.460	0.146	[-0.106, -0.709]
Tourism Marketing and Humanity Sector	0.915	0.219	0.380	4.169	<0.001	0.482, -1.348]
Applied Arts Sector	-0.757	0.676	-0.078	-1.119	0.264	[-2.089, -0.576]
Associate Degree	-0.037	0.310	-0.020	-0.118	0.906	[-0.648, 0.575]
Specialized Junior College	0.178	0.316	0.096	0.565	0.573	[-0.444, 0.801]
Multi-Disciplinary Junior College	0.293	0.445	0.052	0.658	0.511	[-0.585, 1.171]
Specialized University	0.183	0.243	0.085	0.753	0.453	[-0.296, 0.662]

Note. $R^2 = 0.136$ ($N = 213$, $p < .001$). CI = confidence interval for B. Baseline group for Major: Technology Sector. Baseline group for Type of Institutions: Multi-Disciplinary University.

Interpersonal Skills

OLS regression outputs displayed no significant correlation between NGHs' gender, level of education, and type of institutions student graduated from and the ratings of their own interpersonal skills performance. Only one dummy variable (tourism, marketing, and humanity

sector) of the major factor was found to be significant predictor of the evaluation of NHGs' interpersonal skills performance at p-value less than 0.001. This variable was also identified to be positively associated with its chosen reference group, which is the technology sector ($\beta \approx 0.319$). In other words, the NHGs group who graduated from the tourism, marketing and humanity sector gave themselves a higher score than those who obtain a degree in technology by 0.319 point.

Overall, the results of OLS regression analysis indicated that the group of independent variables (NHGs' gender, level of education, major, and type of institutions students graduated from) had statistical significant relationship with the dependent variable (ratings of NHGs' interpersonal skills performance) with $F(9, 203) = F(9, 203) = 3.534$, $p < 0.001$. Moreover, for this model, regression analysis generated a R-square value of 0.135, which indicated that the independent variables of NHGs group (gender, level of education, major, and type of institutions) could predict almost 14% of the variability in the dependent variable (ratings of NHGs' interpersonal skills performance) (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting NHGs' Interpersonal Skills Performance by the NHGs Group

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Male	-0.049	0.147	-0.023	-0.331	0.741	[-0.339, 0.241]
Health Sector	0.190	0.209	0.095	0.910	0.364	[-0.222 -0.603]
Business and Economic Sector	0.243	0.213	0.115	1.145	0.254	[-0.176, -0.663]
Tourism Marketing and Humanity Sector	0.790	0.226	0.319	3.495	<0.001	[0.344, 1.235]
Applied Arts Sector	-0.769	0.696	-0.077	-1.105	0.271	[-2.141, -0.603
Associate Degree	0.215	0.319	0.112	0.672	0.503	[-0.415, 0.844]

(table continues)

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Specialized Junior College	0.066	0.325	0.034	0.202	0.840	[-0.576, 0.707]
Multi-Disciplinary Junior College	0.180	0.459	0.031	0.393	0.695	[-0.724, 1.085]
Specialized University	-0.138	0.250	-0.063	-0.551	0.582	[-0.631, 0.355]

Note. $R^2 = 0.135$ (N = 213, p < .001). CI = confidence interval for B. Baseline group for Major: Technology Sector. Baseline group for Type of Institutions: Multi-Disciplinary University.

Leadership/Organization Skills

For the leadership/organization skills, regression analysis found no significant correlation between NHGs 'gender, level of education, and type of institutions and the ratings of their own leadership/organization skills performance. Major was the only factor that had significant predictor variable of the evaluation of NHGs 'leadership/organization skills performance. However, only one out of the four tested dummy variables of the major factor (tourism, marketing, and humanity sector) were identified as the significant predictor variable of the outcome variables (ratings of NHG's leadership/organization skills performance) in this regression model with a p-value less than 0.05. This significant predictor variable was also found to have positive relationship with its selected reference group, which is technology sector ($\beta \approx 0.378$). In other words, newly hired graduates who got a degree in tourism, marketing and humanity sector rated themselves at about 0.378 point higher than those who graduated with a degree in technology sector.

Finally, the regression analysis outputs indicated that the group of independent variables (NHGs' gender, level of education, major, and type of institutions students graduated from) statistically reliably predicted the dependent variable (ratings of NHGs' leadership/organization skills performance) with $F(9,203) = 3.753$, $p < 0.001$. The R-square value 0.143 generated from this regression analysis also illustrated that about 14% of the variance in the ratings of NHGs'

leadership/organization skills performance could be predicted from the variables - NHGs' gender, level of education, major, and type of institutions students graduated from (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting NHGs' Leadership/Organization Skills Performance by the NHGs Group

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Male	0.047	0.145	0.023	0.326	0.745	[-0.239, 0.333]
Health Sector	0.273	0.206	0.137	1.322	0.188	[-0.134, 0.680]
Business and Economic Sector	0.389	0.210	0.186	-1.856	0.065	[-0.024, 0.803]
Tourism Marketing and Humanity Sector	-0.272	0686	-0.028	-0.397	0.692	[-1.626, 1.081]
Applied Arts Sector	0.929	0.223	0.378	4.166	<0.001	[0.489, 1.368]
Associate Degree	0.136	0.315	0.071	0.432	0.666	[-0.485, 0.757]
Specialized Junior College	0.179	0.321	0.094	0.559	0.577	[-0.453, 0.812]
Multi-Disciplinary Junior College	0.256	0.452	0.045	0.566	0.572	[-0.636, 1.148]
Specialized University	-0.090	0.247	-0.041	-0.363	0.717	[-0.576, 0.397]

Note. $R^2 = 0.143$ ($N = 213$, $p < .001$). CI = confidence interval for B. Baseline group for Major: Technology Sector. Baseline group for Type of Institutions: Multi-Disciplinary University.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this quantitative study was to explore whether there is a difference in viewpoints of employers and newly hired graduates on the social skills performance of those college graduates. This research also investigated if the perceptions of college graduates or employers on graduates 'social skills performance will have significant relationship with some assigned predictor factors. The current chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on social skills in general, social skills in Vietnam workplace, importance of social skills in career success, and what implications may be valuable for use by employers, academic personnel, and college graduates who are active job seekers. Also included in this chapter is a discussion on connections to this study and employability theory. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of study limitations and areas for future research.

The theory for what influences an individual's ability to obtain and retain satisfactory work is employability theory developed by Tamkin and Hillage (1999). This theory comprises four interrelated components: assets, marketing and deployment skills, presentation, and the personal and labor market context. These four elements, according to Tamkin and Hillage (1999), have substantial impact on the employability of an individual. Instead of examining all four factors, the current research only focused on one of the variables included in the first factor, which is social skills. In the current study, the performance of newly hired graduates 'social skills was evaluated by two groups: employers and NHGs themselves. Four particular social skills, including communication skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership/organization skills, were selected for analysis of NHG's social skills performance. Only one out of these four social skills showed a significant difference in the perceptions of the

comparison groups on NHGs 'skills performance. Furthermore, when assessing which demographic/work background factors of the employers or the NHGs would have significant association with their rating on NHG's social skills performance, results identified only two factors, one from each group, that would significantly reliably predict the evaluation of social skills performance of the newly hired graduates.

Findings and Discussions

A review of the literature showed abundance of studies on how social skills play a critical role for college graduates in obtaining and securing satisfactory work (Ganzel, 2001; Sutton, 2002; Towner, 2002; Glenn, 2003a; James & James, 2004; Hemby & Crews, 2005; Glenn, 2008). In Vietnam particularly, social skills are also identified as an important factor in attaining professional success. Truong, Laura, and Shaw (2018) found that almost 80% of both employers and educators in Vietnam had a similar view in the essential contribution of social skills to an individual success, both in career and personal life. Along with the acknowledgement among employers and educators on the growing recognition of social skills 'value, employers continuously express their concerns on the dearth of these attributes among college graduates in Vietnam (Truong et al., 2018). The majority of employers find recent college graduates lacking social skills (Steward, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016). Most college students, on the contrary, feel that they have adequate social skills and are sufficiently prepared for the working world (Steward et al., 2016).

Findings of the current study somewhat supported these two perspectives: The majority of college graduates are confident in the level of their social skills and believe they are well equipped upon graduating to succeed in the global market, whereas the employers are increasingly frustrated by the social skills of recent college graduates (Steward et al., 2016).

After analyzing four particular social skills (communication skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills, leadership/organization skills), results presented a disconnect of perceptions between employers and NHGs on how these two groups rated the social skills performance of the newly hired graduates in Vietnam.

Employers had a higher average mean score for NHGs 'performance on all those four selected social skills compared to the graduates group when they rated their own skills performance. However, the score differences between the employers group and the NHGs group for communication skills, self-management skills, and leadership/organization skills were not statistically significant. Only the interpersonal skills showed a significant difference in regard to the mean scores when being evaluated by the comparison groups. This result implies that the gap between employers' perceptions and graduates' viewpoints on the level of college graduates' social skill performance in Vietnam was not considerably big when only one social skill was founded to have significant difference in the ratings between the comparing groups. Yet, both the employers and recent graduates rated the graduates' all four social skills performance at an average score of 3 points, which was marked as "meet standard" in the survey.

With a score of only "meet standard" given by both groups, this result reveals a different gap besides the gap between college graduates' beliefs and employers' viewpoints on graduates' performance of social skills in the workplace. It is the gap in the perceptions of the comparing groups on how they perceive the importance of social skills in graduate employment. Recent college graduates evaluated themselves to be mostly "meet standard" on all the social skills, in which they believed and were confident that these "meet standard" social skills are good enough to succeed in the workplace and that they are well-equipped with both hard and social skills to achieve any work-related career goals. However, the employers assessed these "meet standard"

scores differently compared to the graduates group.

Vietnam is one of the nations in the world that has the highest labor force participation rates (77% in 2018) (The World Bank, 2019). Yet, the country currently experiences high unemployment rate because employers in Vietnam have troubles in finding potential employees with sufficient social skills set who can engage in higher-productivity activities (Bodewig et al., 2014). Consequently, a score of just "meet standard" might be considered adequate for employment to college graduates but are not enough to succeed in the workplace according to the employers. As a result, college graduates should alert of the employers' actual social skills requirement when seeking for a job so that they can cultivate their social skills in order to boost their chances in employment after graduation.

After identifying a gap in the perspectives of employers and college graduates on graduates 'social skills performance, this study continued to investigate if there are any demographic/work background factors of employers and NHGs that significantly predicted how both the employers and college graduates assess the performance of those graduates' four social skills performance. A total of six factors were selected to be included in the survey for both analysis groups: gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry, major, and type of institutions students graduated from.

Although the results of this research have shown that the group of independent variables for employers (gender, level of education, size of company, and type of industry) and for NHGs (gender, level of education, major, type of institutions student graduated from) statistically reliably predicted the dependent variable (ratings of NHGs' four social skills performance), the dummy variables of only two predictor factors (type of industry and major) were identified to have significant relationship with the reference group on the employers and NHGs' perceptions

of graduates' social skills performance. This result indicates that what business industry employers currently work in or what major sector students graduated from played a vital part in how these two groups rate the social skills performance of college graduates.

Each business industry requires a different set of social skills for workplace success as well as for efficiently contributing to organizational achievements. For instance, working in hotel and restaurant management industry might need great communication skills in order to succeed and reach work-related goals since this industry requires a lot of interactions with clients or customers. On the other hand, organizational skills might be more important than communication skills in the automobile industry to achieve career success since this industry involves lots of works with attention to details. Therefore, employers from different business industries might have different views on which social skills are more important for workplace success, which in turn impact how they rate each social skill performance of those students who recently graduated from college or are actively seeking for a job.

Numerous research have indicated that higher education institutions in Vietnam have been ineffective in incorporating social skills instruction into curricular and the classrooms across the country (Mitchell, Skinner, & White, 2010). Hence, what students acquire in the classrooms is mainly occupational knowledge and skills. Social skills training is not provided or even existed in the classrooms. However, social skills development is not necessary to be done in the classrooms, they can be cultivated through other channels outside of colleges or universities. Students studying in different majors receive different trainings and face different situations, which all influence how they develop their social skills through their time in college. For instance, for those students who study hotel and restaurant management, they are more confident in their communication skills than those enroll in accounting or information technology major

since they have more opportunities to interact and communicate with different types of people through internship programs or work experiences, which in turn help them develop their communication skills. Consequently, graduates from different majors will have dissimilar perceptions or level of confident on their social skills performance, which might impact their social skills assessment and cause the ratings to be different.

When running the regression analysis for the two significant predictor factors (type of industry and major), both variables utilized similar reference category: information technology industry for type of industry factor and technology sector for major factor. For the ratings of NHGs' all four social skills performance by the supervisors group, the results displayed that automobile are reliably lower than technology industry, whereas business and hotel and restaurant management are reliably higher than technology industry. When the NHGs evaluated their performance on all four different social skills, the results indicated that college graduates who majored in the tourism marketing and humanity sector scored reliably higher than those studied in the technology sector.

Based on these regression analysis outputs, the mismatch between the perceptions of employers and NHGs on graduates' social skills performance was shown even more clearly. When being compared to a similar reference category (information technology industry and technology major), the number of industries that are reliably higher or lower than the reference group for all four social skills is three out of six, while only one major out of five is identified to be reliably higher than the reference category. This implies that employers from different industries not only evaluated social skills performance of the NHGs very dissimilarly but also had different viewpoints on which social skills are more important than the others in order to successfully and efficiently work in their own industry. On the contrary, students graduated from

different major sectors seemed to have similar perspectives or level of confidences on the performance of their social skills. This mismatch might occur due to the weak linkage between employers' expectations and students' actual performance in regard to the social skills of college graduates.

The notable gap between employers' viewpoints and NHGs' beliefs on the level of graduates' social skills performance might be the foundation for high unemployment rates in Vietnam. Although social skills have been increasingly perceived by employers as considerably essential factors for graduate employability and career success, the absence of social skills training in Vietnam's higher education institutions have caused graduates to lack social skills, have different levels of skills performance, and be ill-prepared for the workplace, which lead to many dissatisfactions among employers and complications in seeking for employees with adequate and suitable social skills (Truong & Laura, 2015). On the other hand, because the students have misconceptions about the employers' requirements and expectations when it comes to social skills, they cannot recognize that the current levels of social skills performance they think is appropriate enough to use in their chosen occupations or professions are actually insufficient in the eyes of the employers. This might be the main cause for college students to have difficulties in obtaining and retaining employment after graduation.

Implications and Conclusion

The present study set out to explore whether there is a disconnect of perceptions between employers and college graduates on graduates 'social skills performance. This research also investigated if there are any differences in the perspectives of comparing group on multiple assigned factors. Results from the study not only showed a significant gap between employers ' and college graduate' perspectives on graduates' performance of interpersonal skills but also

revealed a mismatch in the perceptions of the comparing groups on how they perceive the importance of social skills in graduate employment. This research also identified two factors, one from each analysis group, to be significant predictor of graduates' social skills performance.

Although Vietnam has been long aware of the growing recognition of the dearth of social skills among recent college graduates, there is still very limited research conducted on the efforts to increase graduate employability through social skills development in Vietnam. Almost all studies on social skills subjects were done from the perspectives of employers or educators. Very few investigations have been performed on graduates' viewpoints in regard to their own social skills performance. By analyzing and understanding social skills performance of college graduates only from the lenses of employers, the researchers will miss out on a very crucial piece of information. Employers and students might not have the same notions on the level of social skills being developed in college graduates, which can cause employers to have difficulties while searching for potential hires with adequate social skills and students to inefficiently acquiring employment after graduation.

Findings from the current study can provide numerous beneficial insights not only to employers and college students but also to educators, particularly academic personnel, on how much differences employers and NHGs evaluate the social skills performance of those students as well as how big of the mismatch between employers' and college graduates' perceptions on the importance of social skills in graduate employment. Employers can use findings from this study to gain a better understanding on what the actual level of performance or confidence in regard to social skills being possessed by those college students who recently graduated and employed. This type of knowledge can help the employers to promote social skills development and create various social skills improvement program for both their employees and recently

graduated students.

As for the college students, they may not be aware of how differently they assess their own social skills performance compared to how the employers actually rate their social skills and vice versa. Therefore, they can utilize the findings from this research to not only recognize the existence of a perception gap between employers and graduates on graduates' social skills performance but also comprehend how much their perceptions on their own social skills performance did not meet the employers' requirements and expectations. By acknowledging this perception gap, college graduates can enhance their social skills and develop more essential skills that are actually sufficient to use in their employment and meet the expectations of employers in regard social skills, which in turn help increase their capabilities to gain employment after graduation and achieve professional success in their chosen occupations.

In addition to the implications for employers and college graduates, findings from the current research is also beneficial to educators or academic professionals. Similar to the employers, by recognizing there is a perception gap between students' evaluation of their own social skills performance and employers' expectations on those performance, educators, including faculties and staffs, can promote social skills development in students by incorporating more social skills training in the classrooms and in their teaching styles instead of applying traditional teaching methods, which focus only on transmitting technical knowledges and skills to the students. According to Radoff, de la Harpe, Dalton, Tomas, and Lawson (2008), "academic staff beliefs are critical and fundamental to any attempts at developing students ' graduate attributes [social skills], since academic staff are the custodians of the curriculum and the ones who determine what is taught and assessed" (pg.6).

Additionally, findings from this study have shown an existed social skills gap in the labor

force, which drives higher unemployment in Vietnam. Although Vietnam is one of the most dynamic emerging countries in Southeast Asia region, the longer period of continuing mismatches between supply and demand of the labor market would have significant effect on Vietnam's economy. Higher education is regarded as dominant to nationwide policies for acquiring shares in the international market and higher education institutions are viewed as the sources of valued human capital to promote this increasing nationwide growth. The fast-tracking change to a market economy requires not only technical skills but also social skills in order to succeed and boost growth. Hence, a proper postsecondary education system is crucial in organizing capable personnel and producing well-trained workforce.

Results of the study implied that college graduates in Vietnam believed their education and skills were sufficient and higher education institutions reflected their confidence in preparing their students for the transition to the workplace. However, literature reviews indicated that new graduates are found to be lacked essential social skills for employment and employers are having hard times in hiring employees with suitable social skills. Such distinct viewpoints must be taken into consideration for effective resolutions to improve graduate employability in Vietnam. In order to keep up with this fast-growing economy in Vietnam, the gap between academically fostered and occupationally desired skills such as social skills need to be lessened. Moreover, in the nation where industries are highly mixed like Vietnam, employers are constantly seeking for graduates who are well-trained and experiences and simultaneously retain the required characteristics. Thus, students not only need to possess technical or occupationally specific skills and knowledge, they also must acquire essential social skills in order to achieve work-related career goals and attain organizational success in this new market economy and mixed industries work environment.

To accomplish these objectives, Vietnam needs to promote and support educators and other school personnel to include more innovative methods of instruction and communication in their teaching. Teachers and faculties in Vietnam, particularly those in public higher education institutions, are still largely utilizing traditional teaching methods, which strongly reflect both the old Soviet top-down approach and Confucian culture where teachers are often considered to be the main source of knowledge (Tran, 2012, 2013). In most of the traditional learning classrooms, there is usually only one-directional communication, with the professor lecturing and students listening. There are very limited discussion opportunities between teachers/professors and students as well as restricted numbers of teaching aids (such as PowerPoints and handouts) to be used during lectures. Consequently, in order to promote communications and social skills development among students, educators should employ and practice more innovative teaching methods, including (but not limited to) teaching with smartboards, cross over teaching, teaching through collaboration, and/or teaching through flipped classroom. These innovative teaching strategies will encourage students to communicate more with teachers and their classmates in class, stimulate students' interpersonal skills, and increase their leadership ability.

Besides applying more innovative teaching methods in classrooms, Vietnam should also advocate for incorporating more social skills training into classroom curricular, comprising more assessment of social skills learning activities, permitting students to arise with their own thoughts for learning, and co-planning to lecture with employers from different industries. By integrating social skills instruction into existing daily classroom activities rather than treating them as an "add-on" to the curriculum, educators will be able to foster students' social skills development in the most efficient way. According to Leffert, Brady and Siperstein (2009), after teachers and other school personnel infuse social skills training within academic instruction, students will

have more opportunities to interact with each other. Academic personnel can then utilize impromptu responses to promote students to practice and exercise "Social Thinking Skills" during those naturally occurring social interaction (Leffert et al., 2009).

In addition to the impromptu responses method, school personnel can also use the classroom modifications method to alter the learning environment and classroom routines. These changes could encourage students' self-initiated use of social skills (Leffert at el., 2009). When teachers and school personnel practice these three instructional strategies, they do not need to have a separate time for social skills training. Instead, the students will have numerous chances to receive social skills instruction every hour of the school day by combining those three teaching methods in classroom curriculum. Leffert et al. (2009) have stated that "by providing opportunities throughout the school day for students to practice Social Thinking Skills, they can help their students to develop a richer understanding of social situations and to resolve potential problems on their own with minimal adult intervention" (p. 8).

After employing more innovative teaching methods and incorporating more social skills training into academic curricula, educators need to perform assessments and evaluations for all the social skills learning activities to understand how effective those activities have been. Not only educators should employ and combine various social skills training techniques for their students, but they should also allow students to develop and use their own ways of learning in the classrooms. This method helps students to enhance their self-management skills and organizational skills. Another effective way to improve and advance students' social skills is co-planning or co-lecturing with industry employers. Yet, educators and other school personnel in Vietnam's higher education institutions have rarely utilize this teaching strategy. Therefore, implementing this particular teaching method might be challenging for most institutions.

However, the schools can start by offering more social skills training workshops being taught by industry managers and supervisors so that students can understand the vital role of acquiring and performing social skills in their career success. After that, colleges and universities should permit and even encourage their faculties to collaborate with industry employers in planning the classroom social skills activities. Only the employers will know which social skills are the ones they actively seek in their employees and which ones are critical for students to obtain and develop in order for them to successful attain an employment after graduation.

Finally, Vietnam should train higher education lecturers to recognize themselves as experts at developing social skills rather than as social skills communicators. Social skills experts are individuals who not only can communicate the importance of social skills in graduate employment but also can have the ability to educate and train students in those imperative social skills. Because lecturers' expertise and skills to plan and implement curricula that intertwine hard skills and social skills are usually deficient, Vietnam needs to help and support its lectures to become experts in social skills development so that those lecturers can be capable of creating and establishing many different innovative teaching strategies to promote social skills enhancement in students. It is also recommended that students should focus on engaging and developing various essential social skills through learning and training processes during their time in college.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

There are two major limitations of the present study. First, this research focused on studying social skills performance of college graduates in Vietnam. Yet, the data were only collected from Ho Chi Minh City. Although Ho Chi Minh City is the largest and most diverse city in Vietnam, future research can look at different cities/provinces with different student population/social-economic background or multiple cities at one time to see if same results will

be yielded. For the second limitation, this study did not examine one particular industry. Instead, it selected six particular industries that are considered as the ones currently with the most in-demand professions and highest-paying occupations in Vietnam. Therefore, more research could be performed on one specific industry to see if the employers and graduates within that specific industry have significant differences in perceptions of graduates' social skills performance. Based on the results of this study, one particular industry should be more closely investigated is information technology since this industry was used as reference category for both comparing groups and yielded different outcomes.

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